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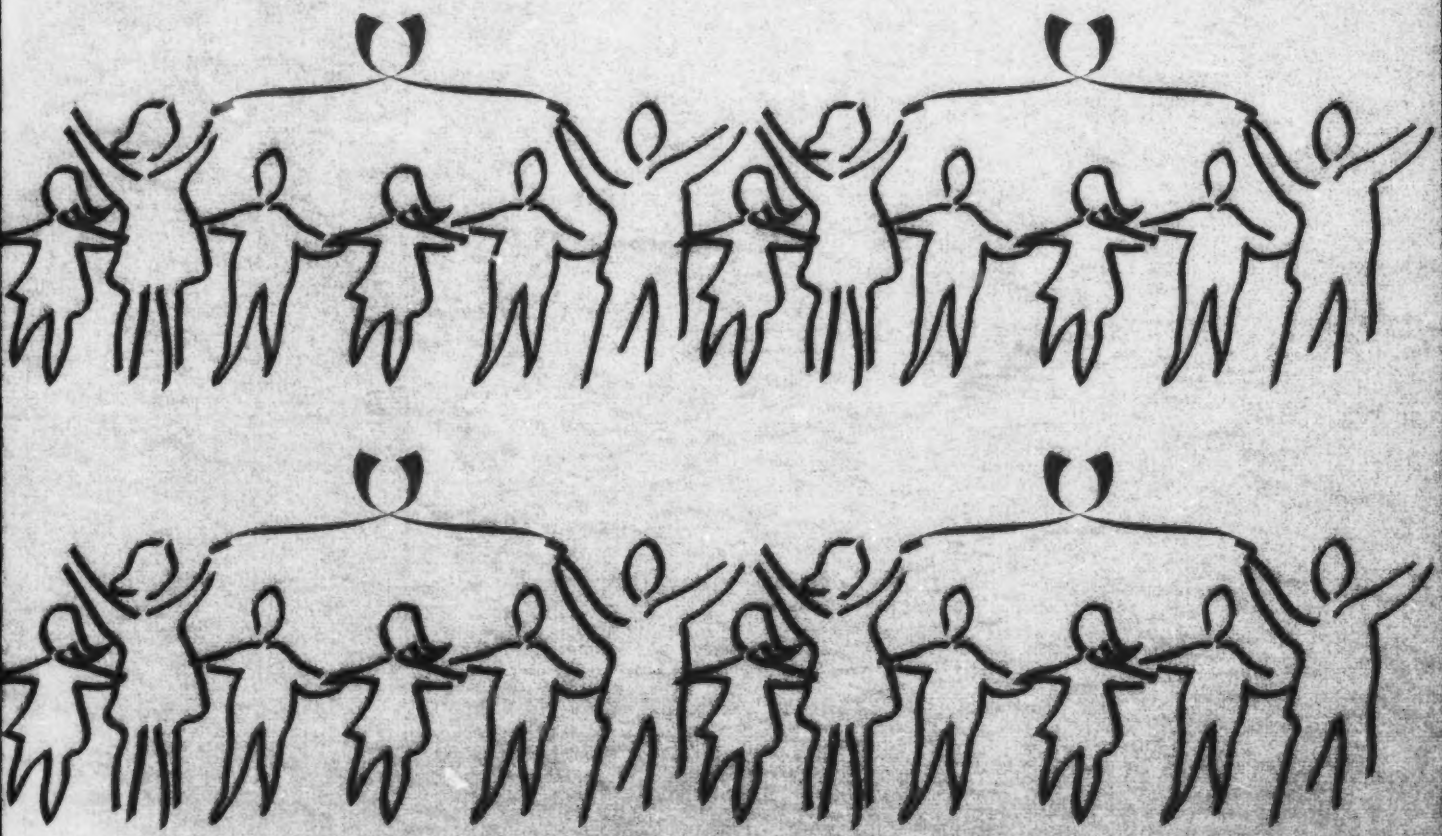
Meaningful Youth Participation in International Conferences

A Case Study of the International Conference on War-Affected Children



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Meaningful Youth Participation in International Conferences

A Case Study of the International Conference on War-Affected Children

Winnipeg, Canada, September 2000

By Gail Cockburn

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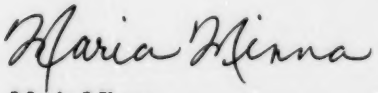
Foreword by Maria Minna
Canada's Minister for International Cooperation

In September last year, I co-hosted one of the largest international conferences Canada has ever held on an issue that is of great concern to me—war-affected children. Government and civil society delegates from over 130 countries gathered to galvanize the international community in support of children affected by armed conflict. All of the delegates brought something important to the conference, but I developed a close bond with one particular group—the youth delegates. I was greatly impressed by these young experts, and asked to spend more time alone with them. In sharing a meal together, in a small-group discussion, or in participating in one of their games, they generously shared their life experiences, their concerns, and their astute observations. They also showed amazing resiliency and, despite the many horrific experiences they had lived through, always had ideas for a better future. I found myself moved by their courage but also by their ideas and commitment. I realized that these young people were the reason why we had all gathered in Winnipeg. They were not statistics in a report but were in front of us giving their joint statement, beside us in workshop discussions, and with us in creating solutions that work for their lives.

These young experts played a substantive and integral role in the conference. They helped to set a standard of meaningful and integrated youth participation in international conferences. Defined as a major goal from the very early stages of the conference, youth participation was carefully planned to ensure that young women and men were able to contribute their ideas and recommendations. In short, we wanted to put the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* into practice by giving young people a meaningful role.

Participation is critical to making development sustainable and relevant to people's lives. The Winnipeg Conference showed me clearly how young people have an important role to play in this process, and how much they want to contribute to their communities. I wanted to ensure that our work with these young people and others like them continued after the conference. Since that time, my department has been working to involve the youth delegates as advisors in CIDA projects that affect them. We are also supporting small projects that the young people themselves have identified and will implement and evaluate. A network has been created for the youth to share information and ideas about these projects and other issues of concern. Because advocacy is key to promoting the interests of war-affected children, we have supported Winnipeg youth delegates to attend important policy meetings such as preparatory meetings for the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Special Session on Children in September.

Following our very positive experience with youth participation at Winnipeg, I encourage governments, UN agencies, research institutes, non-governmental organizations, and others to involve young people in their meetings and conferences. We offer our experiences, lessons, and suggestions in this paper as a concrete example of how the participation rights of children can be realized.



Maria Minna

Preface by Carol Bellamy
Executive Director of UNICEF

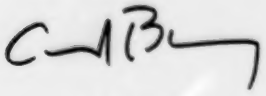
Over the years, conferences the world over have made promises to children. Promises, made in good faith, to ease suffering and end exploitation—and to protect children from the loss of childhood, from rape and mutilation, and from recruitment as child soldiers. Yet, the subjects of these conferences, children themselves, have rarely had opportunities to participate in the discussions that affect their lives.

The International Conference on War-Affected Children, held in Winnipeg, Canada, in September 2000, was a milestone in this respect. The conference organisers, the Government of Canada, invited 50 young people to participate as delegates who represented over 25 war-affected countries. At the conference, these young people were given the opportunity to analyse the issues they faced and to propose solutions, feeding these ideas into both the Experts' Meeting and the Ministerial-Level Meeting that followed. The participation of young people as full delegates at the Winnipeg Conference was an affirmation of the rights of all children and young people to be listened to and taken seriously in matters that affect them, as proclaimed by the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (article 12), and made a major contribution to the tone and quality of many of the discussions.

Throughout the world, examples can be found of children and young people who have taken the initiative to become actively involved in rights issues. In Colombia, a group of young people met to devise a strategy to alleviate the violence caused by decades of war in their country. This led to the Children's Mandate for Peace and Rights, a special election that was held throughout Colombia on October 25, 1996. Originally intended to educate young people to learn about their right to peace, children throughout the country voted on what they considered to be their most important rights. More than 2.7 million children participated in the vote, overwhelmingly voting for their right to life and peace.

A year later, inspired by the success of the Children's Mandate, Colombian adults held a national referendum, The Citizens' Mandate for Peace, Life and Liberty. The voter turnout was the highest ever in Colombia. Both in 1998 and 1999, the Children's Mandate for Peace was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize, the first time that children have ever been nominated for the award.

This is just one powerful example of how young people, if empowered and supported, can take the initiative to make a difference in the world. It is vital that we recognise that young people represent a dynamic and forceful resource for positive change and learn to find ways to harness the energy and the commitment that they bring. I congratulate the organisers of the Winnipeg conference for their initiative, and am pleased to be able to introduce this important report.



Carol Bellamy

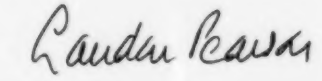
Message from Senator Landon Pearson

Personal Representative of the Prime Minister of Canada to the UN Special Session on Children

The International Conference on War-Affected Children, which was held in Winnipeg in September 2000, was an opportunity for the international community not only to act on behalf of war-affected children, but also with them. The meaningful participation of young people, some with experience in war-affected regions and others who simply wanted to be heard on the issues, was a powerful demonstration of the importance of involving young people in discussing decisions that affect their lives. As one of the major international conferences prior to the United Nations Special Session on Children (September 2001), the emphasis that Winnipeg placed on the participation of young people was significant.

Youth participation is among Canada's priorities for the UN Special Session on Children. As the Personal Representative of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien to the Special Session process, I have continually advanced my conviction that it is by listening to children that the world will find solutions that best meet the needs of the world's children. At the first substantive Preparatory Committee Meeting for the Special Session, which was held in New York in May 2000, Canada and UNICEF co-hosted a well-attended side panel on youth participation. The panel was composed of young people who spoke out on issues of importance in their lives. Canada demonstrates its own commitment to youth participation by including youth delegates on Canada's official delegations to the Preparatory Committee Meetings for the Special Session and to the Fifth Ministerial Meeting on Children and Social Policy in the Americas. The right to participation is key to the full realization of all the rights of children, and to the development of responsible citizenship.

Some Aboriginal communities in Canada have a traditional belief about the role of small children in the cycle of life; they are there to teach the adults in society what it means to be human. Each new life brings a new opportunity to the human family. Cherished and respected, that little person will strengthen the fabric of society. Abused and neglected, he or she will weaken it. Children's rights are not about individualism; they are about community. All human rights exist in the context of other people's rights. A child whose rights to protection, provision, and participation are fully respected will grow up respecting the rights of others. So a society that guarantees the rights of children will eventually become one in which all human rights are respected. That would truly be "A World Fit for Children."



Landon Pearson

Author's Preface

This paper is intended to contribute to the growing understanding of youth participation by sharing both the practical and philosophical approaches taken for youth participation at the Winnipeg Conference. The background planning for Winnipeg is outlined, along with a working definition of youth participation, an analysis of why it is important, and reflections on how youth participation actually worked in Winnipeg.[1] I discuss broad principles for youth participation, as well as specific, concrete guidelines and suggestions that have been distilled from our experience and from the suggestions of the youth delegates at Winnipeg. The following pages are intended to be useful to practitioners, policy-makers, researchers, advocates, and others interested in meaningful youth participation.

My work has benefited greatly from the comments of NGOs, youth, government colleagues, my team members in CIDA's Child Protection Unit, and fellow secretariat members. I would like to give a big thank you to the bright, creative, and hardworking young people who contributed so much to the conference, and whose enthusiasm and sense of fun made my work so enjoyable. For their support and contributions throughout the conference, and in preparing this paper, I am especially grateful to, and pleased to count as colleagues and friends, Linda Dale, Susan Fountain, Kevin Kelpin, Hunter McGill, Geeta Narayan, Martha Nelems, Cory Rabourn, and Nancy Wildgoose.

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[1] For the complete conference report, please see the Winnipeg Conference Web site at www.waraffectedchildren.gc.ca.

Introduction

"Your participation was an integral part of all the discussions which took place during the Experts' Meeting, and you have proven that young people have a place at the decision-making councils of the world."

Maria Minna,
Canada's Minister for International Cooperation,
from her closing statement at the Experts' Meeting addressed to the youth delegates

Growing support for the right to participate

Although the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* was written over 10 years ago and has been ratified by all countries except Somalia and the United States, the right of young people[2] to participate in decisions that affect their lives has been one of the most challenging rights to realize, and remains among the most controversial. UNICEF notes that "article 12 is one of the four guiding principles of the Convention. It was also one of the most revolutionary of the Convention's articles.... Promoting the concept that children have a right to express views, and that adults should listen and take notice of them, has been a major hurdle."[3]

Youth participation raises a number of intellectual, philosophical, and cultural issues that often deter governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), research institutes, and others from involving young people in their activities in a meaningful way. Despite these challenges, a growing number of governments and organizations are supporting young men and women in their efforts to take an active role in shaping the policies and programs that affect their lives, and to contribute to the communities in which they live.

Within the last decade, and especially within the last few years, the increased will to involve young people in policy debates, decision-making, and program development has also increased the demand for case studies, practical guidelines, and discussions on the nature of youth participation. While development workers and political leaders continue to grapple with the meaning and practice of participation by marginalized groups of adults, the concept of youth participation is just beginning to receive the same careful thought. This paper is intended to contribute to the growing understanding of youth participation by sharing both the practical and philosophical approaches taken for youth participation at the International Conference on War-Affected Children, held in Winnipeg, Canada, in September 2000 (the Winnipeg Conference). This candid examination of our experiences is intended to encourage other governments, NGOs, United Nations (UN) agencies, and organizations that wish to help youth make a significant contribution at conferences and meetings.

Although guidelines, considerations, and suggestions are presented, this paper is not intended to be a definitive guide to youth participation at conferences. As many participation researchers and practitioners have emphasized, it is not possible to create a one-size-fits-all methodology. Participation is better understood as an approach than as a series of steps. Because each group of people and every conference is unique, the method for facilitating participation will be different.

Working towards an empowering form of participation also means that practitioners must be aware of and sensitive to the differences among the people with whom they work. For example, the ways that boys feel comfortable participating are often quite different from how girls participate. If a series of rigid steps is created for "youth" participation but they in fact only work well for boys

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[2] The Winnipeg Conference focused on youth in their later teens. Although I use terms preferred by this age group—young people, young women and men, and youth—the tenets of youth participation apply to younger children as well. The type of participation and the methods by which their participation is undertaken will differ according to age. Different age groups have different ways of understanding their world and different ways of expressing themselves, and require different types of support and information. A five-year-old is quite capable of voicing or demonstrating her opinions and ideas, but it would be neither appropriate nor fair to bring her to a policy dialogue.

[3] UNICEF: 15.

(e.g., debates), girls will not be properly heard. The marginalization of girls can be compounded if the event is not only poorly structured for their participation, but is also subsequently reported as having reflected their opinions as well as those of boys. Not only do the types of activities facilitate the participation of certain youth, but the way the activities are structured and undertaken also has an impact on participation. With this caveat in mind, I will outline the principles and basic philosophical approach for working with youth at the Winnipeg Conference.

The Winnipeg Conference – An overview

The Winnipeg Conference, the largest ministerial gathering that Canada had ever held, involved over 800 delegates, including officials from 132 countries, 45ministers, international and Canadian NGOs, youth, academics, UN agencies, members of the media, and the private sector. As the first international conference on the full range of issues facing children affected by armed conflict and as a meeting intended to contribute to the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2001, the conference was a potentially risky[4] but crucial occasion for young people to contribute their analyses and solutions to a global discussion. The conference was an experiment of sorts for Canada, an attempt to follow the principles of meaningful participation within the formal structure of a high-level, international meeting. Although it would have been simpler to listen to youth testimonies or statements from a parallel youth meeting, it was important to the integrity of youth participation at the conference that the young people be able to discuss and contribute to decisions alongside their adult colleagues. This interaction was seen as unpredictable but essential for creating appropriate and relevant decisions, for the effectiveness and sustainability of those decisions, and for youth and adults to learn to work together.

The conference was organized as a set of cascading meetings. The three-day Youth Delegate Meeting started the conference. Youth delegates were then joined by NGO, academic, private-sector, government, UN, and other adult delegates at the Experts' Meeting. Many of the conference delegates (including 20 youth delegates) joined the two-day Ministerial-Level Meeting that included ministers, heads of international NGOs, UN agencies, and other high-level representatives. Those who were not delegates at the Ministerial-Level Meeting were able to attend as observers.

Fifty youth, most of whom had been affected by war, were selected from Canada and around the world to participate as full delegates at the conference. They were nominated through an open process that included a set of selection criteria.[5] Twenty-six youth delegates came directly from war-affected countries, while 24 were Canadian (of whom some had recently arrived from war-affected countries). Together, they represented over 25 different countries affected by war, as well as Canada. The young women and men, ranging from 15 to 23 years old, had an average age of 18. They came from a variety of backgrounds: rural and urban, low income and well-off, youth in school, and working youth. While about half of the Canadian youth came originally from war-affected countries, a number did not. Some youth delegates had participated in international events before; others had much less experience. Some of the 30 young women and 20 young men spoke English or French, but many did not.

[4] Some potential problems that can arise when young people have been invited as full participants to an international meeting are outlined later in this paper. Briefly, they include not having enough preparatory time to allow youth to make substantive input; youth not being taken seriously; physical or emotional risks to the youth; and the possibility of youth remaining in the host country, among others.

[5] The selection process and the youth program will be discussed in detail in Section E.

In addition to the youth delegates selected and prepared by the conference secretariat, countries were encouraged to include young people in their official country delegations. These young people were selected and chaperoned by their country officials and were treated as regular delegation members. Although a detailed program was not created for these young people, they and young people attending with NGOs were invited to a number of social events with the youth delegates. This allowed all the youth at the conference to get to know each other, discuss the issues they face, and make connections for future work together.

The efforts made at Winnipeg to significantly involve youth in the conference interested and engaged a great number of people within the Canadian government, as well as Canadian and international NGOs, our colleagues within UNICEF and the Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and other conference delegates. The youth delegates and their contributions to the conference received enthusiastic support from other conference delegates. In speeches and comments made in side meetings and workshops, dignitaries, international experts, and country representatives expressed their support for the substantive input from the youth delegates, and for involving those whose lives were being discussed. In formal and informal evaluations of their experience, the youth said that they were very pleased to have had the opportunity to discuss the issues that affect them with the leaders of the world, and to have a say in setting international priorities and policies. Although they had some specific concerns, which will be discussed later in this paper, the young men and women were very happy overall with their role in the conference.

Although it will take more than one conference to create global support for the meaningful participation of young people, the Winnipeg Conference contributed to this effort. It is hoped that through their experience at the conference and in related follow-up work, the youth delegates will continue to develop their governance skills and commitment to working on issues they help identify.

"It [the Winnipeg Conference] is, I believe, the first such conference of its kind that not only focuses on war-affected children, but gives opportunity to them to tell us, the government representatives here present, what exactly they believe their government and civil society, together with national and international NGOs, ought to be doing to catch up with the times, so to speak, in the very difficult circumstances confronting them."

From the statement given by Sierra Leone's Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Hon. Mrs. Shirley Y. Gbujama

Why youth participation?

Youth participation requires a great deal of thought, commitment, time, flexibility, and political will. Some wonder if it is worth the effort. Others think that youth participation is a public-relations gimmick or a passing trend. It is only when viewed in the broader context of human rights and effective, appropriate, and lasting development and political decisions that the crucial nature of meaningful youth participation emerges.

"Children must be given better opportunities to participate in shaping their own future. Young people's involvement in civil society creates a sense of belonging, solidarity, justice and responsibility within the community."

From the statement given by Ms. Maj-Inger Klingvall, Minister for Development Cooperation, Sweden

Deepening democratic practices and strengthening civil society
As the international community continues to grapple with complex international and domestic issues, there is an increasing recognition that it will take the energies of all parts of society—governments, academics, NGOs, the private sector, and other parts of civil society—to identify the root causes of problems and to propose and act on lasting solutions. Civil society is starting to receive more recognition and support for its crucial role in this process of collective problem-solving. There is also a growing recognition that civil society is comprised of a wide range of groups of people and that many of these groups—such as young people—have not had as much opportunity and support to contribute as others.

Around the world, many governments are expanding the ownership of policies and programs to the people who are affected by them. This involvement of men, women, girls, and boys who have first-hand knowledge of an issue and unique perspectives on solutions is practical and essential to the long-term success of these policies and programs. Both international and domestic development experiences have shown us how solutions can be short-lived, costly, and even harmful when those affected are not central participants in the creation, implementation, and evaluation process. The Winnipeg Conference tried to build on these lessons by involving war-affected children in analyzing the situation and defining priorities for action.

Participation is not an abstract human right or a purely political stance separate from the concrete realities and needs of people's lives. The right to be involved in decisions that affect one's life is indivisibly linked to economic and social well-being and positive change. This sharing of power is practical—it leads to better decisions, better development programs, and more sustained results. Some development practitioners feel that although this principle is important, it is impractical or unhelpful to follow when working with children in need of special protection—such as war-affected children. However, the reality is the opposite: "...the effectiveness of protective policies and programmes can be substantially increased by recognizing, reinforcing and acting in responsible partnership with children, thereby supporting and enhancing their capacity to act individually and collectively on their own behalf."[6]

Participation that is based on sharing power and decisions has been identified by a number of countries and development agencies as crucial to improving lives and communities. The *Government of Canada Policy for CIDA on Human Rights, Democratization and Good Governance* emphasizes that "the equitable distribution of power and resources within and between societies, and public participation in decision making, are critical to the success of CIDA's work [to reduce poverty and to contribute to a more secure, equitable, and prosperous world]."[7] In her workshop presentation at Winnipeg, the Hon. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Minister of Women's Affairs and Child Welfare of Namibia, emphasized the philosophical and

[6] William Myers with Jo Boyden and Gillian Mann, 2000: 2.

[7] Canadian International Development Agency, 1996: 3.

practical impetus of involving young people in civil-society participation: "The approach of perceiving young people as passive objects upon which interventions must act, rather than subjects participating in the shaping of our communities, is completely wrong. If we continue with the same view when it comes to our efforts with regard to peace talks, then it is likely that we might end up perpetuating the very same problem we intend to solve."

"While not dismissing the truth of this statement [that youth are leaders of the future], we say that we have a crucial role to play in our societies now. We are an important part of our communities and want to play a role in making decisions and taking action."

From the Youth Statement presented at the Winnipeg Conference

The participation of young men and women in the decision-making process represents a broadening and deepening of democratic development and governance.[8] Youth are a significant part of civil society, and have much to contribute to the governance of their world. Their contribution helps adults make sound decisions, but it also helps youth themselves. In sharing their knowledge, insights, and creativity, young people are helped to develop important life skills such as problem analysis, working with different people and views, developing feasible solutions, and seeing these solutions through. Meaningful youth participation can also help young people develop the skills they need to address their problems when outside assistance ends, and to develop these problem-solving, collaboration, and leadership skills for their adult years.

The depth of young people's participation and decision-making will increase as they mature. Contrary to the fears of some adults, youth participation does not mean that young people will have complete control over decisions. The emphasis is on adults and youth working together respectfully, and on providing opportunities for youth to develop their decision-making skills with the guidance of supportive adults. A very important place for this process to begin is in the family. Families of all descriptions are crucial to helping young people mature and acquire skills that will strengthen their contribution to their homes and communities.

Children and young people whose opinions are taken seriously and who have a say in decisions that affect them are far more inclined to feel a sense of belonging to their communities and respect for their structures of governance. In a paper written for UNICEF, Gerison Lansdown emphasizes the importance of youth participation to increasing their understanding and experience of democracy: "Promoting involvement of young people is a means whereby they can acquire knowledge and understanding of political processes as well as strengthening their interest in and commitment to democracy."[9]

Youth – Today's citizens

Young people are often referred to as our future. They will become our decision-makers, artists, scientists, politicians, and philosophers. Their commitment to working in collaboration with others and their skills in analyzing problems and in creating and implementing just decisions will benefit us all. Youth participation plays a critical role in helping young men and women develop the necessary commitment and governance skills for their future roles.

While they may be our future, youth are not merely "adults in waiting," but are members of our communities today. They have experience, information, views, ideas, and solutions. Young people understand their world in a qualitatively different way than adults. This knowledge can add to an adult's view of the world. In many countries, 50 percent or more of the population is under the age of 18. Policies made without this large section of society will have less of a chance to be successful. When young people (or any other group for that matter) have been

[8] Democratic governments can vary widely in their form and practices, but all involve civil society in decision-making.

[9] Lansdown, 2001: 10.

involved in decision-making in a meaningful way, they will have a sense of ownership over decisions. These decisions will necessarily be more relevant to their lives, and youth will want to work towards making them a success.

Where war, poverty, and diseases such as HIV/AIDS decimate the adult population, young people must step into their parents' shoes, often at a very young age. Even those young people with parents are often forced into an early adulthood. These young people—often girls and young women—carry the burden of finding food, shelter, clothing, and health care for themselves and younger siblings. Many must give up their education in order to make a living. These youth are caught in a difficult world; they must do the work of an adult, but are often considered too young to have a say in running their communities. It is especially important that the international community listen to and involve these young women and men, many of whom have not had the opportunities to participate in conventional youth programs.

What is youth participation?

"...children can no longer be perceived as not-yet persons, waiting in the lobby of life to become mature..."

Maria Santos Pais, UNICEF, from a talk delivered at Harvard University, 1999

Even among those who agree that youth participation should be supported, the understanding of youth participation varies. Participation is an often-used expression, and has almost as many meanings as there are people who utter the word. It is understood and implemented on a spectrum that ranges from passive attendance to empowering (for example, participating equally in writing outcome statements and making decisions). Roger Hart discusses the various levels of participation as a ladder ranging from outright manipulation, decoration, and tokenism, to shared decisions with youth and adults.[10]

Although there is a broad range of issues and activities in which young people can make a contribution (such as helping to create development programs), this section will deal specifically with youth participation at conferences. There are a number of different ways of involving youth in a conference. A few of these approaches are explored below, as well as the type of participation that the conference secretariat chose to pursue at the Winnipeg Conference.

1. Approaches to youth participation at conferences

Testimonials – Going beyond youth telling their stories
Historically, young people have not had any input into conferences that deal with children's issues. In order to rectify this situation, young people are now often asked to give testimonials about their situations, problems, and experiences. This may be done in person or via video or printed materials. Young people telling their own stories is meant to give a human face to the issue, to provide accurate information, and to inspire adults to action. Youth themselves may wish to tell their stories, because this helps them to be heard. But involving youth in a meaningful way involves more than inviting young people to give a testimonial. Certainly listening to youth (and acting on their information) is better than not listening at all, but participation is far more powerful if young people are involved in not only providing information and inspiration, but in helping to analyze the situation and plan solutions. They should be valued for their intellectual and analytical contributions, and not simply for the first-hand and emotive life stories they can provide.

Voices of youth – Whom do youth delegates represent?
Young people are frequently assumed to speak on behalf of all youth or large groups of youth. In fact, their selection and preparation do not always ensure they genuinely represent the constituency for which they are expected to speak. As well as the false assumption of broad representation, young peoples' views are often sought without providing them with background information or support to discuss and analyze a situation. Their views may be solicited without prior preparation, or their input may be sought on a document that they may not understand or may not have had the necessary time to consider. To further compound the problem, they may not have been previously involved in the issue being discussed. It is unfair to the young people, and misleading to the other conference delegates, to ask these young people to speak on behalf of "youth." Although it is important that their views be heard, meaningful participation requires that young people understand the issue and, if they are expected to represent a group of youth, have adequate time and support to prepare their presentations or views with the input of their peers.

[10] Hart, 1997.

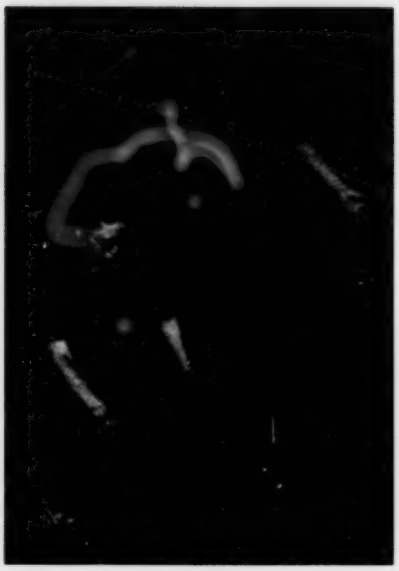
Youth mobilization and outreach – Communication or participation?
Youth participation is often thought of as mobilizing youth to participate in an adult-defined agenda. In public-education campaigns, adults use various communications tools to promote a specific issue or point of view to young people and other members of the public. Although this work may eventually lead to more empowering forms of participation, youth often have very little input into these campaigns, or little opportunity to explore alternative ideas or to contribute to efforts to address the issue under discussion. It may be well-intentioned, but if youth do not have access to the information they need to understand the nuances of the issue and a significant role in determining the priorities and strategy for dealing with the issue, they are part of a public-relations or social-marketing campaign and not part of a participation effort.

Youth participation without adult involvement
Completely self-sufficient, youth-initiated projects and campaigns can be an excellent way for young people to learn cooperation and governance skills. It gives them the opportunity to work without adult influence and to set their own rules and goals. In an adult-initiated conference, however, leaving young people completely alone to understand the substantive agenda, the international context, the procedures, and the current debates would impose an unfair and unrealistic burden on them. It may also lead to the youth being unprepared for discussions, damaging their self-esteem, and leading adults to believe that youth are not capable of substantive input. Although it is absolutely crucial that adult facilitators or supporters do not manipulate young people, failing to provide information and different points of view (in order to keep the youth view from outside influence) is patronizing. Young men and women need to be able to make decisions based on all available information, and should be seen as capable of sifting through different ideas, analyzing problems, and developing solutions. If the perspectives of young people are to be heard and respected, they should not be isolated from adult debates and ideas.

A completely hands-off approach to youth participation may run the risk of absolving adults of their responsibility to support young people. It may also lead to a lack of much-needed adult action. A facilitator can be an ally for marginalized communities such as youth. This person should not direct, but should be a catalyst for a process of exploring issues affecting the community.[11] A facilitator should not only help the youth analyze the issues, but also provide information that adds to the group's knowledge.

[11] The idea of an outside change agent, or a support person to assist and empower marginalized communities, is widely discussed and debated in development literature. See, for example, Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994: 208; Burkey, 1993: 75.

Although young people may need to meet without adult observers or participants in order to prepare for a conference, participation should enable them to engage with and influence the broader community. Most young people want to be part of their communities and the wider adult society. They know very well that adults hold power, and they seek an initiation into this world so that they can learn the skills they will need to deal with adults in all aspects of their lives. Genuine dialogue and decision-making with adults helps young people understand various points of view and the process of collective decision-making. It also gives them access to centres of power, and demonstrates the effect that they can have on an outcome.



2. The approach to youth participation in Winnipeg

Broad principles of participation for the Winnipeg Conference
The philosophical approach guiding youth participation at the Winnipeg Conference can be summarized by the following points:

- Participation should be understood as an approach or process, not simply as an outcome.
- Youth should be involved in decision-making and substantive discussions with adults.
- Information, adequate preparation time, and sensitive adult support are essential for enabling youth to provide substantive input.
- Young people should be respected as active, intelligent participants, not passive victims or objects of pity.
- The participation of a diverse group of youth should be facilitated. Measures should be taken to help those youth who are more marginalized to present their ideas.
- Young people should feel safe to speak and have a say in what happens to their information. They should be able to withdraw their consent to participate in the conference or to be interviewed at any time.
- Flexibility and openness to change on the part of adults are essential for participation.

Participation is a process
Far from a simple recipe, meaningful youth participation involves a philosophical approach more than a set of mechanical steps. Robert Chambers, an internationally recognized participatory researcher, emphasizes that participatory work should never be extractive, should be flexible and, above all, must focus on process rather than on an output.[12] In practical terms, this means that even if the perfect guide to youth participation could be written, if it is undertaken without a deep understanding of and commitment to an empowering form of participation, the result could be a manipulated or disrespectful involvement of youth. Meaningful participation is not achieved by following instructions (such as Participatory Action Research or Participatory Rural Appraisal), but by working flexibly and respectfully with a particular group of people to develop their capacity and opportunities to address the issues of most concern to them.

With a process approach, the means of getting to a target is equally or more important than the target itself. We knew that youth participation would happen along the way to the Winnipeg Conference, not only at the conference. Those planning youth participation at the conference (the youth participation team) tried to enable youth participation in the planning process through exploring the issues

[12] Chambers, 1997: 224.

to be discussed at the conference, in reviewing the draft outcome document, and in providing an opportunity for the young people to work with each other.[13] Through the process, youth were encouraged to develop their own capacities to analyze information and to formulate solutions. It meant that although young women and men produced outputs for the conference such as speeches, dramatic pieces, statements, and videos, the most important accomplishment was developing the ability and confidence of youth to become involved in making decisions on issues that affect them. A process approach is a sustainable approach because this type of participation does not end when the output of a youth statement or a certain number of youth at a conference is met. It encourages young people to continue a process of empowerment by becoming involved (or continuing their involvement) in their communities and to contribute to creatively solving the problems that they and others face. This sustainability is enhanced when youth have ongoing relationships with organizations that will continue to help them explore and become actively involved in issues relevant to their lives.

A substantive role for youth

Because there are many definitions of youth participation, it was important to clarify the model of youth participation chosen for the International Conference on War-Affected Children. The youth participation team wanted participation to be more than youth simply attending or observing a meeting of adults. We wanted youth to be full delegates at Winnipeg—discussing, debating, and making decisions with adult delegates. We wanted them to bring their experiences, but more importantly, their analyses, priorities, and recommendations, to the conference. Their role was planned to be significant and substantive, not purely ceremonial.

As much as possible in a conference, the approach adopted built on the views of leading development thinkers who believe that participation is "closely linked to questions of empowerment and control over decision-making."[14] They also argue that meaningful participation should be understood from the perspective of power. This is not a new concept. An empowering concept of participation stems from the influential work of Paulo Freire in Latin America in the 1970s. Freire's education work with poor people showed that they were willing and able to take an active role in examining and addressing their own problems.

The underlying belief of an empowering form of participation is that all people, even the very marginalized, are capable of analyzing and have a right to analyze their own situation as the first step towards improving their lives and communities. The practical outcome of such an approach is that policies and programs reflect more closely the issues that the affected consider most important. The policies and programs to address these issues are more relevant and culturally appropriate to the people being assisted. In addition, when marginalized groups are also involved in implementing and monitoring as well as defining the problem and ways to address it, these policies and programs are more sustainable, cost-effective, and successful. Such an approach does not eliminate the need for outside support or action, but helps to balance the power relations between different groups of people and ensures that democratic principles are put into action.

More and more, organizations are adopting this definition of participation by involving civil society in analyzing and addressing the complex and pressing problems facing our communities. "Participatory development is now seen as the best

[13] The youth participation team consisted of the key people working on the youth delegate program—the head facilitator, the secretariat youth participation policy officer, the director of the CAP project/manager of the international youth delegate selection and preparation, and the organization that selected and arranged the Canadian youth delegate participation.

[14] Brohman, 1996: 252.

approach for achieving change, allowing people to become agents and not just objects of the development process."[15] Youth participation is one more step in the growing effort to make space for civil society at the decision-making table.

"We are tired of only being the victims; we want to be the ones who make a difference."

Youth delegate, closing statement at the Winnipeg Conference

Respect youth as active participants

Youth are often thought of as passive victims. Many people who want to help children describe them as the youngest and most vulnerable victims of disease, poverty, and war. While it is very true that children suffer disproportionately from these situations, they may have developed coping strategies, and may make important and intelligent decisions on a daily basis. Many have strong views and have a keen desire to contribute to their communities. Although their contribution will deepen as they grow older, even young boys and girls have something to offer. Helping to strengthen young people's role as actors is essential to their long-term well-being. Proceedings from an international consultation held in Oxford on Children in Adversity reinforce this important point: "It has been especially noted that protective approaches that leave children too exclusively dependent on adult charity and initiative risk stranding children helplessly when outside protection ends. Frequently they also retard children's ability to adapt positively to new situations and, eventually, to develop into fully responsible, skilful adults."[16]

Support the participation of all young people

Children and young people are no more homogenous than women, farmers, or other groups of adults. Within the very large group called "young people," there is a wide range of experiences and personal differences. Young people include girls and boys, very young and older, those who are well-educated and those with very little education, those from wealthy families, and others who are poor. Some youth are indigenous people, and others have disabilities. They range from all possible ethnic backgrounds and cultures. There are also a great number of individual differences and learning styles. Some young people are more comfortable with non-verbal forms of expression such as drama, while others like to talk and debate.

With all of these differences, some youth will find it easier to speak up, give their opinions, and get their priorities on agendas. If all people are seen as equals, with equal rights to have an impact on the decisions that affect them, all young people must be made comfortable and encouraged to speak, not just the dominant group or culture. It is not enough to implement participatory structures and processes; those who work with young people need to ensure that all groups benefit equally from these efforts. Otherwise, inequalities are created or exacerbated. Michael Kaufman cautions that: "Participation does not exist in the abstract... Within any participatory structure, overall forms of social inequality and oppression are usually reflected and maintained. The challenge we face is to develop not only participatory mechanisms of empowerment but the means to overcome the structured inequalities in social power."[17]

In order to support the active participation of all youth and to avoid exacerbating divisions and inequalities, a conscious effort must be made to involve youth from groups that are often excluded. Street-involved youth or working children may be left out of programs that focus on youth in schools. In many countries, children with disabilities may be isolated at home and may need special efforts to involve them. Beyond reaching out to these groups, their participation, once they are involved in a conference or project, requires attention to factors such as how issues

[15] Slim and Thompson, 1995.

[16] William Myers with Jo Boyden and Gillian Mann, 2000:2. For a discussion of the resiliency of children in conditions of adversity, see proceedings and conference materials from the international consultation held in Oxford, September 2000: www.childreninadversity.org.

[17] Kaufman, 1997.

will be explored and how their views will be expressed (e.g., drawing, small-group work, drama, large-group discussion, writing), the types of team-building exercises, the values and cultural assumptions of the facilitators, rules or codes of conduct, and languages spoken.

Throughout the world, there are more opportunities for boys to participate than for girls.[18] Girls often have more work around the home, while boys benefit from programs to "keep them out of trouble." Boys are often thought of as future leaders in need of programs that develop their skills and confidence. In many countries, girls are discouraged in a number of ways from speaking out and becoming politically active. When they do participate, their style is often less confrontational or competitive than boys. Their issues are very often different from boys' issues, making it difficult for them to put their priorities on a common agenda. Girls may feel shame or embarrassment in raising issues that relate to sexual abuse or sexual health and education. They may need to meet separately first to discuss their concerns and later present it as a group to the boys.

"Young people need to be both architects and actors in promoting an environment of equality, democracy and peace."

From the workshop presentation by the Hon. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Minister of Women's Affairs and Child Welfare, Namibia

Ethnicity and race issues also need to be seriously thought through before bringing developing-country youth to a Western-organized conference. Although it is important for all young people to be treated respectfully and to have their opinions taken seriously, it is especially important that young people, who are often marginalized because of their ethnicity as well as their age (and often their income), be involved in a meaningful manner. Inviting young people from developing countries simply to make a token appearance exacerbates the power imbalance between North and South, and may lead to damaged self-esteem or disillusionment with the possibility of genuine participation in such an event. Efforts should be to ensure that young people from various cultures and backgrounds are comfortable and are supported so that they can participate to their fullest. This may mean that warm-up activities do not involve physical touching, or that songs and games from different countries are used. It also means that the facilitator and other youth should understand that priorities and experiences will differ among young people of different races and ethnicities. These issues should be seen as part of the overall youth statement and discussion, not as side or special-interest issues.

Give youth control over their information

Equally important to ensuring that all youth can participate is ensuring that the young people have control over their information once they have given their opinions. It should be made very clear that if young people do not want something included in a statement or public speech, it will not be included. They should be able to withdraw their consent at any time—from participating in a conference, an interview, or a project. Participatory research has been criticized as being exploitative when outsiders use "participatory" techniques to extract information to conduct analysis, planning, and implementation of programs without the people who provided the information.

Working with youth is different from working with adults

Youth participation at conferences can be beneficial to youth and adults alike, but a different approach from working with adults is required. This will, of course, vary with the age of the youth. Techniques and considerations for working with 10-year-olds will be quite different from working with youth in their late teens (the age group invited to Winnipeg). Youth, although as heterogeneous as adults in their opinions and backgrounds, also share a number of important experiences and tendencies.

[18] Hart, 1997: 36.

In looking at the broad commonalities of youth, it is essential to realize that, as discussed earlier, some youth will need more or different kinds of support to participate. Children from different backgrounds respond to different methods of expressing their views, such as art, music, dance, verbal discussion, small-group work, storytelling, or boisterous icebreakers.

Youth bring first-hand knowledge of their own lives and fresh perspectives and innovative solutions frequently overlooked by adults. They are often open-minded, idealistic, and show much less fear of change and new ideas than adults do. They often seek support or assurances from adults and may also be more easily taken advantage of or pressured by adults. They may have very high expectations of conference outcomes, and may be frustrated or discouraged without a discussion of expectations and limits to the conference. Young people need more variety in their work than adults. They respond well to creative approaches and find it easy to combine work and play. Youth are still developing their talents and intellectual capabilities and, although adults do not cease to develop, youth are growing and changing much more rapidly. Although thought of as fragile, young men and women are incredibly resilient and often have strong opinions because of their experiences. Young people may not have the research skills of adults and may need support to think critically and analytically—to look for the root cause of problems and to carefully weigh popular or media opinions on the topic. They may also need support to understand the political implications and sensitivities around views they may express.

With these talents and tendencies, it is clear that flexibility is needed. A youth program should ideally be able to respond to the needs of the youth—for instance, do they want to focus on a different aspect or stop to get more information? They may need more breaks than adults, and time to be creative or to do activities that involve physical movement. Informal activities are important for easing the culture shock of a formal adult meeting. To make sure that youth are not coerced (or encouraged) into expressing certain opinions, an unmanipulative but knowledgeable facilitator is absolutely essential. Youth will want to see that the fruits of their labour are taken seriously, and that an official time has been set to discuss their views. Young people have a great need to have some concrete indication that their input has had an impact. Youth often seek interaction with adults who can play a mentoring role or who can give them information on issues of concern. Formal and informal events can help provide an opportunity for this interaction.[19]

[19] The guidelines section of this report outlines more suggestions for working with youth.

Anticipated challenges and risks

Trying to fit our view of participation within the standard procedures for an international ministerial conference posed a number of challenges. As much as the youth participation team hoped to undertake meaningful participation, the constraints of a conference meant that compromises had to be made. While young people are capable of and very interested in participating in conference discussions, there are a number of inherent obstacles to achieving meaningful participation at an international conference. Roger Hart emphatically notes that national and international conferences are not ideal settings for children's participation. In fact, Hart comments: "The typical conference is not ideal for *adult* participation... [my emphasis]."[20] Hart explains that conferences often lack the necessary preparations such as time to consult with peers, self-selection of youth speakers, adequate information, and carefully thought-out youth programs that support meaningful participation. The type of continued work in young people's home communities or with the international community that is needed so that youth can make a substantial impact on the issue is difficult to ensure with stand-alone events such as conferences.

While a long-term, community-based program is a more supportive, effective, and contextualized place for youth participation, the secretariat believed that participation at an international conference could be much more than a token appearance. We thought that youth who were involved in their own communities, who had a chance to prepare and, most importantly, who had their input received in a respectful way could contribute alongside adults to the decisions made by the international community. Outlined below are a few of the key challenges we identified when planning the Winnipeg Conference.

Time – Essential to participation

Often organized in extremely tight time frames, conferences can make youth participation very difficult. Meaningful youth participation takes a great deal of time—time to build skills, trust, and confidence, to discuss information and develop views with peers, to have input into all types of planning decisions, to prepare youth-friendly versions of adult documents, and to develop follow-up plans. Informed decision-making takes time to explore options and discuss the issue. Even more time is required if the young people involved in this decision have not had a great deal of practice. Asking youth to make decisions before they understand the issue sacrifices the important process dimension of participation and may lead to token participation. In a UNICEF discussion paper, Rakesh Rajani highlights this element of time: "Democratic procedure - thoughtful deliberation, fair assessment of different perspectives, ensuring everyone participates - also needs time. Effective participation, in a conference...requires time for preparation. When processes are rushed the tendency will be to fall back on old undemocratic habits, or to pretend to participate."[21]

Being taken seriously

Youth participation at an adult conference risks the possibility that the young people will not be taken seriously and will simply be invited to add flavour. To keep a conference interesting, youth may be asked to give moving testimonies to spur adults to action, or to perform in some other way. Adults may see youth statements more as adding an emotional context rather than as the substantive input of real delegates.

[20] Hart, 1997: 143.
[21] Rajani, 1999: 15.

"All of our programming is guided by the *Convention of the Rights of the Child.* When we planned this conference, we had one very important thing in mind—we wanted to put the Convention into practice by giving young people a meaningful and substantive role."

Maria Minna,
Canada's Minister for International Cooperation,
from her opening comments
at the Ministerial-Level Meeting

Not taking youth seriously can take many forms. Open skepticism is one troubling possibility. Alternatively, youth may be congratulated and overly appreciated by adult delegates each and every time they speak, regardless of what they say. Although well-meant, this too is a sign that youth are seen more as a novelty than as thoughtful contributors to a conference. Another consequence of not taking youth seriously is the possibility that their input may not have equal weight in the proceedings or in the final conference documents. A consequence of this failure to respect the contributions of youth is the possibility that youth will feel manipulated and cynical about democratic participation. Their self-esteem and personal development may also be damaged.

Gaining support for meaningful participation

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges in undertaking youth participation at a conference (or in a project for that matter) is overcoming the skepticism about young people's capabilities to contribute. Developing a shared understanding of meaningful youth participation takes a major investment in time and internal communication. Some officials may feel that youth have nothing to say, or that they will be undiplomatic. These officials may believe that an international conference is a serious occasion that could be compromised by involving youth, and that youth should not be given status equal to high-level dignitaries. This skepticism can be at times well-founded. If youth are not given the information and support necessary to prepare for the conference, then they may not provide substantive input. If they are not given a significant role and respect at a conference, then they may in fact become "entertainment" rather than full delegates. In this case, it may be better not to involve young people.

Flexibility and international conferences

Most international conferences, whether at the expert or ministerial level, are not intended to be inclusive and participatory. They are designed to receive authorized input in a structured and very formal process. Thus the speakers are chosen and the program is defined well before delegates arrive. The draft report or communiqué, to save time in the meeting, will have been outlined and some content may already be agreed on. In order to consult their colleagues and prepare their positions, government representatives need to know roughly what the outcome document will include even before they arrive. Strict protocols and hierarchies are usually enforced at such meetings. For example, non-governmental organizations and individuals are not usually invited into the drafting sessions to finalize declarations or other outcome documents to be signed by governments. Some categories of participants may not be allowed to speak at certain sessions, or may only be allowed to give a brief statement. Governments generally like to know what will be discussed and who will speak so that they can prepare their own speeches and send the appropriate representatives. Some like to know in advance what any NGO or youth speakers will say, and may even want to have a role in choosing these speakers.

A participatory approach, meant to be bottom-up, suggests that youth should be able to choose their own speakers, and have a role in choosing discussion topics and the format for discussions.[22] It also implies that young women and men, as well as other groups present, should be involved in creating any outcome document (or that this document should be billed as a government-only document to prevent the perception that others had a hand in creating it).

[22] Roger Hart emphasizes the importance of allowing children to select their own representatives and speakers at conferences, and how seldom this is done.

Risks to youth and liability of the sponsoring government or organization
At any conference, there is always a risk that a delegate will be hurt, robbed, get sick, or put themselves at risk. As the hosts of young people, conference organizers have a responsibility to ensure their safety and minimize this risk. Legal experts note that there must be "due diligence" in the treatment of young people, whether or not they are minors.

Another serious concern is the possibility that youth delegates may be used for sensational media stories that expose more than the youth would like. Some youth may even be at risk of reprisals back in their own countries if they are too candid or critical of their government. While being able to speak openly at a conference is important, the safety of the young people once they return home must be the highest priority.

One risk that may always be present with international delegates, especially those from difficult circumstances, is the possibility of their remaining in the host country. Seeking asylum at international events is not a new phenomenon, but may be embarrassing to the country of origin and to the host country. Although many adult delegates may seek this option, youth are especially scrutinized because their participation at conferences is still relatively new, and because immigration officials often see young people as potential flight risks.

Follow-up
Conference follow-up is a notoriously difficult activity. Usually, a small group of people continues to steer the conference agenda, while many conference delegates try to integrate conference ideas as they return to the many other demands they face at work. When working with young women and men, follow-up is very important. Follow-up helps to support their growth as people who are learning to contribute to their communities and their world. It indicates that their input is just as important after an event as it was when the TV cameras were focused on the event. If youth have been gathered for an event and have become excited about an issue but have no support in nurturing this interest, they will become rightfully cynical about the point of such an event, or even about the issue itself. If youth are brought to a conference as individuals, they may not have an organization with which they can work after the conference, and may feel frustrated or abandoned. Although adult delegates may enjoy seeing youth at a conference, they may not support youth participation back in their own countries, making follow-up work even more difficult for the youth.

Youth participation at Winnipeg – A description and assessment

In developing the youth program for the conference, the youth participation team tried as much as possible to be guided by the principles discussed above. Unless the youth program was taken seriously and a great deal of thought was put into planning, the conference could exploit the youth by involving them in a token role. This being said, our ideals were limited at times by constraints such as time, protocol, and resources.

Youth program in a nutshell

Twenty-six international youth delegates (16 young women, 10 young men) from 16 war-affected countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and South America, and 24 Canadian youth delegates (14 young women, 10 young men, many originally from war-affected countries), together with 26 media youth from Canada, met for a three-day preparatory meeting outside Winnipeg. At this meeting, the international and Canadian youth met both separately and together. Following this preparatory meeting, the 50 youth delegates (26 international and 24 Canadian) attended the three-day Youth Delegate Meeting at the Winnipeg Conference. The media youth worked with local schools throughout the conference to undertake outreach activities and to report on the conference. The youth delegates then entered the Experts' Meeting as full delegates, along with NGOs, government officials, researchers, and others. Twenty youth carried on as full delegates to the Ministerial-Level Meeting, while the other 30 youth delegates had observer status at this meeting.

Overall assessment

The conference demonstrated that young people are capable of making a serious and valuable contribution to policy and programming dialogue. The conference contributed to attempts to level the playing field between adults and youth by supporting the youth in making extensive preparations, by helping adult delegates to work with youth, and by treating the youth as equal to adult delegates.

Although the youth noted in evaluations that some adult delegates were not prepared to listen to them, the young men and women were exceptionally pleased with the conference and their role. They saw it as both a learning and a teaching experience. They felt that they contributed valuable knowledge about their countries, their concerns as young people, and possible solutions. They also felt that they had a key role in helping adults learn to work with youth. One young woman noted the importance of patience when adults and young people start to work together: "The Experts' Meeting was very good, but we have to give experts time to adjust to youth participation."

Youth from countries where youth and government officials do not often mix were especially pleased to have a chance to meet and give their views and concerns to ministers and to other government officials in the workshops. In particular, Canada's Minister for International Cooperation, Maria Minna, spent a great deal of time with the youth delegates, listening to their priorities and questions. Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Olara Otunnu, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Madame Graça Machel, UN Expert on Children and Armed Conflict, also made time to meet separately with the youth delegates. This time spent with the young people helped to emphasize the central role they had in the conference and the important things they had to say.

"Most of our recommendations came true today. Everyone will go home saying, 'I accomplished something, I did something good for the world'."

D., youth delegate

The impact they had on the final document from the Experts' Meeting was another highlight for the youth delegates. They felt that they accomplished a great deal and were able to impress their views upon the other delegates. One young woman reflected: "In the final document, our recommendations are reflected. We had an impact."

Many adult delegates in Winnipeg gave extremely enthusiastic support to the youth delegates and to how youth participation had been handled at the conference. A large number of ministers, dignitaries, UN officials, and other delegates highlighted the substantive contribution of the youth, and the importance of living up to the right of participation outlined in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Although some of these comments may have been made in politeness, they were not limited to public statements. In private meetings with Ministers Minna and Axworthy, in small workshop discussions, and in the corridors, many adult delegates made a special point of stressing how much the youth had enriched the conference discussions.

Some supporters of meaningful youth participation did worry that the more enthusiastic kudos for the youth might have been for their simple presence and not for the substance of their input. Because many adults are not accustomed to working with youth, they may overreact and overly praise the young people's contributions. A number of participants observed that this reaction was similar to the early days of the women's movement, when supportive men clapped enthusiastically any time a woman spoke—regardless of what she said.

Internal advocacy work

Although it evoked ambivalent feelings in many secretariat members and senior officials, youth participation was set as one of the three major conference goals. Creating a shared vision for this goal of youth participation within the conference secretariat was nonetheless very time-consuming and demanding. As a relatively new concept, the idea of significantly involving youth was met with skepticism by some Canadian officials. Others were eager to invite youth to present their experiences of war, but did not understand the need to involve youth in decisions and as equal delegates. As a result, one of the most important tasks in setting up the youth participation component at the conference was advocacy and awareness-raising among the secretariat staff and Canadian officials. An emphasis on communication, including discussions on the vision of youth participation and what had to be done to achieve this vision, helped to develop a deeper understanding of participation.

Internal advocacy also included a great deal of negotiation on how often youth would appear in the plenary sessions and as workshop speakers, and what their role on drafting teams would be. This negotiating was an ongoing process because the programs for the Experts' and Ministerial-Level Meetings were continually developing, and there was a large number of adult dignitaries whom the conference secretariat felt compelled to include in the program. Negotiating involved not only securing a number of speaking roles for youth, but also ensuring that these roles were substantive and not simply testimonies.

Assessment

Developing a shared vision of youth participation was essential, but took much time. The need for more extensive advocacy work with all staff (including logistics staff and senior officials) only came to light part way through the planning process. Without a shared vision, some officials focused on public-relations or communications activities with youth in the Canadian public instead of on more meaningful participation that would involve youth as full delegates. Hiring communications

staff to work specifically on youth outreach and related communications strategies could have helped keep the distinction between meaningful participation and public relations-type outreach clear.

Structure

The overall structure for youth participation consisted of two main streams that came together at the preparatory meeting prior to the conference. The youth participation policy officer was responsible for the overall policy, program content, planning, and direction for youth participation, but a number of organizations and the head facilitator were involved in the selection and preparation of the youth, program development, and organizational processes. Together, this group constituted the youth participation team.

"I've attended many conferences, but this conferenceis the best I've ever been to, because the commitment came from a very high place. The staff are all the right persons, they understand the importance of our participation. They gave us a lot to take back to our countries. The conference will make a difference."

S.O., youth delegate

International delegates

Twenty-six youth from war-affected countries were brought to Winnipeg as youth delegates. Half of these youth were (and are) involved in the CIDA-funded Children as Peacebuilders (CAP) project. These young people were involved in CAP workshops in their own communities in order to explore their experiences of war, to analyze the situation and their concerns, and to design and implement projects to address these problems. The other half of the international youth delegates were nominated by their peers and local NGOs. The director of the CAP program also managed the selection and preparation of these international youth. The international youth met with each other separately and with Canadian youth delegates at the preparatory meeting before the conference.

Canadian delegates

In order to involve Canadian youth in foreign-policy discussions, the Minister of Foreign Affairs asked the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development[23] (CCFPD) to conduct its National Forum (an annual policy consultation with Canadians) with Canadian youth to prepare for the conference. Twenty-four of the 50 Canadian youth at this consultation then became delegates at the Winnipeg Conference, while the other 26 became "media youth" and reported on the conference along with the adult members of the media. Over half of these Canadian youth came (in some cases very recently) from war-affected countries. The National Forum consultation occurred at the preparatory meeting for the Winnipeg Conference. The CCFPD contracted a private organization that organizes youth events (the Students Commission) to organize and run the National Forum.

Assessment

The two-stream structure tried to address two different groups of youth and two different reasons for involving them. The two organizations working with these two groups of youth, with their different approaches and mandates, led to differences in youth-selection processes, preparation, knowledge, and expectations. Some of these differences were overcome through shared activities at the preparatory meeting and through substantive discussions at the Youth Delegate Meeting. CAP's approach was to involve young people who were actively involved in the issue, were prepared to analytically address the conference themes, and had a strong connection with an NGO working on the issue. CAP wanted to facilitate sharing between youth who were living in conflict situations to help them prepare for the adult meeting, and to involve them substantively in an adult forum on an issue that directly affects their lives. The Students Commission aimed to bring Canadian youth representing the various regions, languages, and cultures of

[23] CCFPD is a centre for foreign-policy consultation and research attached to Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Canada to Winnipeg in order to provide a venue for them to meet, to raise their awareness, and possibly to undertake further action on the issue of war-affected children. This organization approached youth participation as a process of hearing from Canadian youth on Canadian foreign-policy issues, and placed more emphasis on the unstructured meeting and exchange of ideas between youth from different areas.

Age group

Although participatory work can be undertaken with children of all ages, the conference secretariat chose to work with the age group of 15 to 23 (with an average age of 18). All of the Canadian youth and most of the international youth were 18 and under. The narrow age range was chosen because we thought the youth would share some common experiences and because the young men and women would need to learn to work together in a short amount of time. We felt that this would be easier if they were close to the same age. The choice of young people in their late teens was based on the activities in which the youth would participate. Because the youth delegates would be part of fairly formal policy discussions and would spend much of their time listening to and giving speeches and verbal interventions, as well as drafting their own statement and giving input to one of the outcome documents, older youth were a more appropriate age group to involve. Adolescents are also a category of children often ignored in work to support child rights. Choosing young people in this age group helped to highlight their specific experiences, concerns, and abilities.

Assessment

The age group invited to the conference worked very well in their conference role. The small age range meant that the young people had experiences in common that they were able to explore and analyze. The young people were young enough to represent youth but old enough to understand the proceedings, to provide input for policy discussions, and to interact with the adults on a collegial basis. The young people brought through the CAP project were encouraged to bring forward the views of younger children from their communities. A more systematic attempt to help all of the youth delegates bring forward the ideas of younger children would have been beneficial.

Selection of the youth delegates

To ensure a fair and open process for selecting appropriate youth delegates, both Canadian and international youth delegates were chosen based on a set of selection criteria.

In the case of the international youth, the selection criteria were developed by the CAP director and the youth participation policy officer. Half were selected through the CAP workshop process and a discussion of the selection criteria with youth and local NGOs. A number of these youth were nominated by their peers to represent their organization, while others were nominated through a combination of the input from their peers, the nominating NGO, and practical considerations (e.g., who held a passport or could get one in time for the conference). The other half of the international youth were selected through an open nomination process in which a call to nominate youth and selection criteria were distributed to international youth organizations and NGOs working with youth. The nominations made by organizations were reviewed and the final selection was made by a committee that included the CAP project director, the youth participation policy officer, as well as representatives from Senator Landon Pearson's office,[24] from Amnesty International Canada, and from the CAP project. Two university student interns were on the selection committee. (Please see Appendix 2 for the international youth delegate nomination letter.)

International youth were selected based on the following criteria:[25]

- active participation in a program for war-affected youth;
- acknowledged leader in his/her organization;
- active promotion of community-based peacebuilding work;
- strong analytical abilities and the capacity to speak at public events including both adults and youth;
- ability to translate his/her experience of war into a broader, global understanding and analysis, and ability to undertake a policy discussion; and
- experience with conferences or meetings.

In making the final decision, the selection committee aimed for a balanced representation by taking gender, income, and geographic factors into consideration, as well as the type of conflict the young person had experienced (e.g., refugee children, ethnic conflict, intra- or inter-state conflicts, past conflicts, as well as simmering conflicts).

The selection committee also sought youth delegates who had had counselling and were not in the process of working through any traumatic experiences. The committee believed that youth who were able to work at an analytical level and would not be retraumatized by talking about the issues would be more appropriate as delegates. Still, the youth participation team knew that some youth might be disturbed by the conference discussions (access to counselling is discussed later in this section).

The Canadian youth were selected through a nomination process run by the Students Commission. Instead of an NGO or youth group nominating these youth, young people who were interested in attending the conference could nominate themselves. Because the Canadian delegates were selected to first attend the National Forum (which formed part of the preparatory meeting), their selection had to fit with the National Forum mandate and directives. For example, young Canadian men and women were chosen based on a desire to reflect the

[24] Senator Pearson is the personal representative of Canada's Prime Minister to the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children.

[25] See Appendix 2 for the youth delegate nomination letter.

composition of Canada. The process also aimed at selecting youth who were interested in or had knowledge of the topic of war-affected children and who volunteered in their communities. Young Canadians who had experienced war or whose families came from conflict areas were especially encouraged to apply, as were war-affected Canadian youth who had taken part in a series of roundtables that had been held across Canada.

Assessment

Although similar criteria were set out, the goals of the Canadian and international selection committees were slightly different. As a result, youth delegates with different levels of knowledge, experience, and personal goals for the conference were selected. Some youth were intellectually engaged with the issue for the first time and were not able to discuss issues as deeply as others. Other youth were very active and wished to further the agenda. Some had first-hand knowledge of the issues while others did not. These different levels of knowledge and interest are possible to even out, but take time and can be very frustrating for youth who have different expectations of the conference.

Originally, the CAP project was chosen to select the international youth delegates because the workshops held in the young people's communities were excellent preparation for the conference, and the ongoing project provided follow-up with the youth after the conference. The secretariat chose to add a number of international youth delegates to ensure representation from countries and youth organizations that were not involved in the CAP project. For the most part, this addition worked very well. The criteria served to ensure that these youth had as much (or more) preparation as the CAP youth.

Youth preparations prior to the conference

Many of the international and Canadian youth took part in workshops and round-tables in their own communities before coming to the three-day preparatory meeting held just outside Winnipeg. In addition, youth-specific information packages on substantive and logistics issues were sent to them. A number of the international youth prepared their priorities and statements before arriving in Canada. This allowed them to consult with their peers in the organizations and communities they represented.

The three-day preparatory meeting for the youth delegates was organized and planned by the Students Commission and the CAP director, with input from the conference secretariat and the head facilitator. This preparatory meeting allowed the youth to meet, share experiences and priorities, and start to work together as a group. The meeting comprised 24 Canadian youth delegates, 26 Canadian media youth, and 26 international youth delegates. Activities were held together as well as separately, in order for the youth to explore their different and similar experiences, ideas, and priorities and to start to build a team. Time to recover from jet lag, to meet others, and to talk informally was essential to this meeting.

During these three days, the separate international youth activities focused on non-verbal activities, including dance and artistic expressions of their experiences (drawing silhouettes and mask-making), concerns, as well as solutions. The international youth moved from these expressions to analysis and to developing shared priorities for the conference. The Canadian youth based their work on the recommendations made at the Canadian roundtables. They discussed and focused this work in order to create recommendations for the CCFPD to present to the Canadian government.

Training in using video and drama was provided for all the youth in preparation for the conference. International youth delegates were given warm clothing at the preparatory meeting, and all youth delegates were given conference T-shirts and caps as well as sweatshirts from a youth-focused Canadian TV station.

Assessment

Holding some separate Canadian and international youth meetings and activities during these first three days helped the international youth to express themselves in a way that was more comfortable for them, and to discuss issues common to young people living in areas of armed conflict. The Canadian youth who had recently arrived from war-affected countries identified more closely with the international youth and felt a bit caught in the middle—neither Canadian nor international. Perhaps discussions could have been held first with the international youth, then with the international youth and recently arrived Canadians, and then broadened to include the entire group.

The loose structure was good for youth to meet and talk, but it meant that there was not enough time to pull together the results of their separate discussions into a common list of priority issues for input into the conference. This led to more work at the conference's Youth Delegate Meeting.

The non-verbal activities worked well for all the young people, but especially the international youth. The Canadian and international youth were slow to integrate, although some Canadian and international youth started to develop ties that became strong by the end of the conference. This was especially true of youth originally from the same country or ethnic group. There were twice as many Canadian youth (including the media youth) as international youth at this meeting, leaving the international (and some recently arrived Canadian) youth to fit into a more outgoing, Canadian youth style instead of the group creating its own, mixed culture and style.

The extensive information packages that were sent to the international youth were especially useful in preparing these delegates for the content of the conference and for Canadian cultural differences. The information also helped make the youth comfortable by giving detailed logistics information for their travel and daily living when in Canada (calling home, food and health issues, etc.). Providing the international youth delegates with warm clothing was necessary and much appreciated, given the cool weather and some problems with lost baggage.

Preparation for media coverage

The presence of the media at a conference where there is youth participation raises a number of dilemmas, such as allowing youth the opportunity to make their views known, while at the same time protecting their privacy and security. These issues were especially important in Winnipeg because a number of the international youth (and some Canadian youth) did not, for security reasons, want to be filmed or to have their names used. On the other hand, some youth understood the media as a powerful political tool and were extremely eager to discuss their situation and to present their views.

To ensure that media contact was beneficial to both the media and the youth, a media plan and a number of policies had been established before the conference. The youth program, from the three-day preparatory meeting of Canadian and international youth to the three-day Youth Delegate Meeting, through to the Experts' and Ministerial-Level Meetings, had carefully scheduled regular times for youth press conferences and photo opportunities. The youth delegates selected their spokespersons for the press conferences.[26] The youth who did not wish to be interviewed or photographed had the option of not participating in these events, and were given a special baseball cap that signified they could not be filmed. All members of the media were warned that if they did not respect this guideline,

[26] These youth delegate media spokespersons were different from the media youth who covered the conference as outside, accredited media people.

they would have their credentials revoked. Other policies included always having an adult staff person or chaperone present during interviews and having youth do interviews in pairs or groups, rather than individually. During a quiet time at the preparatory meeting, the international youth were asked if they would like to be interviewed at the conference. The majority of these young people said that they would not like to be interviewed, but did not mind being photographed as part of the group. The list of those youth who did not wish to be interviewed was given to those organizing the youth interviews. The rights of youth to privacy, to refuse to answer certain questions, and to terminate or refuse an interview, as well as the security implications of giving too much personal information, were all discussed extensively with the youth.

A great deal of time was devoted to discussing which meetings and events the youth delegates were comfortable opening to the members of the media. Although this took time away from the discussion of conference issues, it allowed the youth to present their thoughts and concerns around the media, and to decide as a group how they could limit harmful exposure. Some officials and dignitaries were sensitive to the youth delegates' media concerns. For example, Minister Minna gave the youth the option of meeting with her without any members of the media present. Being able to make this decision helped the youth gain a degree of control over their media exposure.

Assessment

Despite these policies, and the active support of some high-level officials, several problems were encountered. Because it was a large international gathering involving the majority of the world's nations and many ministers, a large contingent of international members of the media was present. Although specific times had been set for youth press conferences, and many youth social events had been opened to members of the media, the youth delegates and small team of youth organizers were overwhelmed with requests for one-on-one interviews with the youth. Some high-profile members of the media insisted that specific youth be pulled from their activities with the other youth delegates. This was problematic; pulling specific youth out of meetings disrupts their preparations, group cohesiveness, and learning from each other. It is also emotionally exhausting for the young people, and can lead to fears of reprisal once the young person is back home.

Many of the international and Canadian youth were very disturbed with the behaviour of the media representatives and felt misrepresented or exploited (although there were a few sensitive reporters). For example, when a number of youth delegates clearly said that they wanted to discuss solutions and their role at the conference instead of outlining the horrors they had seen, one media representative said that this was not very interesting and terminated the interview.

The different goals of the communications staff and those working on youth participation meant that the pressure for more coverage and interviews with the youth had to be balanced with the rights of the youth to privacy and safety. The overwhelming requests for youth from specific geographic areas had to be balanced with the desire of other youth to be interviewed. Most members of the media insisted on interviews only with youth who had the most recent and the most horrific experiences. Youth who now live in Canada, and who were often more prepared to speak about the situations that their families had left behind, were passed over for interviews because their experiences were considered to be too distant.

While the baseball caps were a good idea in theory, in practice they did not work very well. The young people did not like to be singled out as having security problems. Although the youth delegates (as well as the media youth) were told that they would all get caps at the end of the conference, a few requested (and wore) the caps during the conference because they liked the style. Clearly a different "no media" signal would have worked better.

Although the staff who were setting up the interviews had a list of those youth who should not be interviewed, the entire youth participation team and support facilitators did not have this list and could not effectively help prevent unwanted or dangerous interviews. This problem was compounded by the fact that in the high-pressure atmosphere of the conference, some youth changed their minds or were encouraged to change their minds in order to accommodate the many requests for interviews. When some of these youth were questioned again in a quiet moment of reflection, they reverted to their original position that a one-on-one interview would be quite dangerous. Some youth had the experience of leaving these interviews and realizing that they may have said things that could harm them or their families.

When the youth organizers said "no" to an interview, some members of the media said that the youth alone should decide if they wanted interviews and that adults should not cause them to rethink their decision. However, youth agreed for many reasons. Many youth agreed due to cultural reasons. Around the world, a large number of cultures find a direct "no" difficult to give, especially if the request comes from a person in a position of respect. The young people said that they felt an obligation and respect towards the often white, adult members of the media as well as to their hosts, the conference officials. Some youth explained that if they could give more interviews, someone would help. They felt a commitment to their communities, even if a probing interview put them at risk and was psychologically damaging. It was also difficult to switch from the atmosphere of sharing and trust that had characterized the youth meeting to the potentially exploitative, one-sided sharing that members of the media wanted to record (one reporter even wanted to record two youth from different countries opening up to each other about their losses and family tragedies).

Perhaps the degree of coverage that the youth interviews gained helped bring the issue to the world's attention, but it was quite damaging to some of the young people. The entire time the youth were preparing, and throughout the conference, the youth participation team tried to help them move beyond their past and understand how they can contribute to solutions for a future they would like to see. The youth program started with individual experience, but helped the young people move to a more analytical level and to look at the issue in a global context. We emphasized that their role was not to tell us about the terrible things that they had endured, but to help work on solutions and policies to address these issues. The focus of the media on horrific experiences made it hard for the youth to be valued for their many other contributions to the issue. One youth delegate complained angrily: "They want to drag us back into that and stop us from moving forward. They don't want to hear the good things we are doing and the ideas we have."

Media sensitization could have sent a clear signal to members of the media on appropriate interaction and would have set the same ground rules for all media representatives (many were worried that another reporter would get more access). A tighter and more firmly applied policy on media interviews with the youth would have helped. This would have limited the number of interviews a young person did in a day, and would have ensured that a trusted adult accompanied them to the interview. It also would have respected the cultural difficulties of saying "no" and would have ensured that each "yes" was a genuine agreement. Although it was our policy, with the number of interviews requested, the youth participation team did not have enough staff to ensure that all the young men and women were accompanied at all times. Although media issues were discussed at length with the youth, they could have contributed more to the media policy, including why an adult should accompany them to interviews. Decisions could also have been made in the group instead of on a pressure-filled individual basis.

A number of evaluations were conducted with the youth delegates. One of the questions asked was: What did you take away from the conference?

"We learned that the youth of the world are an important force to stop war which hurts so much. We learned that our voice counts, that we can change things. We learned that we are important actors. We also learned of the reality in other countries, feeling solidarity with other villages. Finally, we learned so much that we were surprised and we were conscious of that in the different places that we have been invited to speak about the conference. Thank you for this opportunity."

B. and J., youth delegates

Facilitation

Sensitive and knowledgeable facilitation at the Youth Delegate Meeting and throughout the remainder of the conference was essential for supporting the youth's exploration of conference issues and to prepare their input into the conference. The head facilitator gave substantial input to the design of the Youth Delegate Meeting program so that a variety of learning styles and ways of expression were incorporated.

The head facilitator orchestrated the three-day Youth Delegate Meeting, assisted by support facilitators (such as CAP staff, youth facilitators from the Students Commission, Amnesty International, Senator Pearson's office, and the secretariat). The head facilitator prepared information to be discussed, based on the conference agenda, and created activities for the youth to explore these issues and to prepare their conference inputs. At the end of each day, she held a daily meeting with support facilitators and the youth participation staff to go over any problems and to plan for the next day. As well as facilitating the Youth Delegate Meeting, the head facilitator was present at the preparatory meeting in order to provide support and to maintain consistency throughout the entire youth program. Throughout the conference, she was a central figure for the youth delegates.

At the end of each day of the Experts' and Ministerial-Level Meetings, the head facilitator met with the youth to reflect on the day. The youth discussed the high points of their day and their frustrations, and asked for more information or clarification of points discussed at the conference. At the end of the conference, the head facilitator lead a wrap-up meeting to seek additional reflections from the youth. These evaluations were very important in helping the young people digest new experiences, congratulate themselves, and prepare for the next day. It also helped deal with problems as they arose. While preparing this paper, I sent an additional evaluation to each youth delegate. The questions I asked the youth for this report are attached in Appendix 6.

Listening to all youth

The head facilitator worked to ensure that all youth were able to express their views by employing a wide variety of techniques and by discussing respectful ways to work with each other. Youth delegates were reminded to speak slowly and pause for those who worked through an interpreter. These young people were given signs that read "PAUSE" so that they could signal when the proceedings were moving too quickly. When it became clear that some young people were less forceful, the head facilitator worked to even out the opportunities to speak.

The head facilitator also encouraged the young people to examine how the issues that were discussed affected different groups of youth differently (e.g., girls, the poor, indigenous youth). The gender dimensions of conflict were explored as a major topic for discussion and recommendations. Specific groups of young people and their experiences and needs were also discussed (e.g., refugee children, children with HIV/AIDS, child soldiers).

Assessment

The conference was fortunate to have an experienced UNICEF international youth facilitator as the head facilitator for the Youth Delegate Meeting. Her content knowledge and sensitivity to different cultures and genders proved indispensable. The youth delegates were largely appreciative of the support that facilitation gave them. A number of international youth specifically asked for adult assistance and as much information as possible, so that they would be adequately prepared to discuss and provide informed suggestions to their adult colleagues. They did not want adults to determine their viewpoints, but they did not want to be left alone in their work.

"We took the following from the conference: skills of organizing youth groups; self-confidence; working with different people with various ideas and issues; but in the end linking things together for the good of all."

E. and W., youth delegates

In terms of staffing, it would have been useful to have more small-group facilitators. Because a number of the youth participation team members were occupied by media and dignitary requests and logistical issues, there were few support facilitators to help the head facilitator. When the youth broke into small production teams to work on speeches, the video, the Youth Statement, a dramatic piece, press conferences, and other pieces of work, they did not have enough facilitators to support their work. This was difficult for the young people and tiring for the facilitators, who tried to move from group to group. It would also have been better to have more support facilitators with content knowledge and experience in facilitating international youth. Respecting different youth and different methods of expression and supporting youth who speak different languages are important skills for support facilitators, not just the head facilitator.

Youth Delegate Meeting at the conference

The three-day Youth Delegate Meeting, which occurred prior to the Experts' and Ministerial-Level Meetings, was established as a youth-only space. The youth participation team felt that it was crucial that the youth meet without the pressure or influence (or potential risk) of adult observers. We wanted them to feel free to ask any questions and to say whatever they felt, without worrying about what adults would say. The time alone was essential to team-building and to finessing their priorities for the rest of the conference. The only adults in the room were those working directly with the youth as facilitators or translators. NGOs and dignitaries were asked not to observe the youth proceedings, but time was set aside to interact with these supportive adults. Members of the media were strictly forbidden to attend the Youth Delegate Meeting, except for the opening ceremony.

The meeting mixed small-group work, physical activities, artistic, creative, and writing activities with content. The themes of the conference were explored and workshops were given on working with the media, the drafting process for the Experts' and Ministerial-Level Meetings, and the role of youth in this process. The youth also selected their own speakers for the spots that had been kept open for a youth speaker, and selected their representatives for the drafting processes and for the Ministerial-Level Meeting. Each day included some analytical activities to explore the issues and some hands-on, expressive activities to present the suggestions of the youth. A number of social activities, such as dinner at an Aboriginal centre, bowling, a boat tour, a ride on an antique train, going to films, and meeting other youth at the conference, were also incorporated into the program. Some free time was also built into the original program, and young people were able to "opt out" of activities.

In order to give all delegates a chance to make their views known, each issue was presented briefly to the large group for questions, clarification, and discussion. Youth delegates then deepened their discussion with a walk-around activity in which youth moved around the room to different stations for each conference topic. At each station, they discussed the topic informally with others and wrote their views in their own language on large sheets of paper. This format allowed youth who were not comfortable speaking in the large group to still have input in shaping the youth delegates' recommendations on each issue. Each afternoon, the youth worked in self-selected production teams that allowed them to translate the morning's analysis into outputs such as video, drama, art, speeches, or written articles that matched their interests, learning styles, and language needs.

An important part of the youth meeting was expectation-setting. This helped to set realistic expectations for an international conference and for youth involvement in the conference. Pre-established decisions (e.g., a security policy), expectations (e.g., that youth would create a statement), and program elements (e.g., meetings

with dignitaries) were outlined to the youth delegates. Staff working with the youth were very clear about the drafting committees—how youth would have a great deal of input into the Experts' Meeting document, but would not have direct input into the government document created at the Ministerial-Level Meeting.

Tight deadlines meant that the youth program planning had to be completed at the same time as selecting the youth delegates. It was important not to circumvent the community-level workshops and careful selection process by preselecting youth delegates, but this meant that the youth program was designed without the input of the youth delegates. A number of measures were put into place to mitigate this problem. Consultations were held with older youth advisors who had attended a previous day-long workshop on the issue and who worked closely with NGOs involved in the issue of war-affected children. The secretariat also tried to keep the program flexible—spots were held open for youth to self-select as plenary speakers, workshop presenters, and drafting-team members or observers for the outcome documents. Youth chose which issues they wanted to focus on—either those covered by the conference or others. Youth delegates decided that they wanted to present a dramatic piece as part of their statement at the Experts' Meeting, and the secretariat staff were able to reorganize the program to allow them to do this. Another key area of flexibility that helped promote meaningful participation was the Youth Statement. Instead of providing a draft document that the youth delegates could edit or submitting it to adult approvals, the Youth Statement was created on-site with no adult review and approval process. A few ways in which flexibility was maintained for the sake of meaningful youth participation were:

"There were so many [memorable] moments—from when we worked on the team-building exercises at [the beginning] up until our companions intervened with such knowledge and courage in front of the ministers and governments. The whole experience was very impactful."

B. and J., youth delegates

- Two youth observers were allowed to attend the ministerial-level drafting committee. Four youth were given spots as full members of the Experts' Meeting drafting committee.
- No limits or suggestions were given for the Youth Statement or for the youth delegates' interactions with ministers and dignitaries.
- Youth delegates had complete freedom to create a video and dramatic piece for the conference.
- Youth delegates self-selected their own speakers for the workshops and the opening and closing ceremonies. Youth selected their own representatives for the drafting committees and the Ministerial-Level Meeting.

Assessment

Although the flexibility build into the youth program helped to increase youth input, it would have been preferable to have the youth delegates selected early enough for their input into the youth program and in the design of the media and security policies. This was impossible given the tight timelines for the overall Winnipeg Conference, but is a strong recommendation for conferences with more planning time.

At one point, the three-day Youth Delegate Meeting was reduced to one-and-a-half days to accommodate the National Forum meeting of young Canadians that had been planned to start immediately before the Youth Delegate Meeting. With this short amount of time, it would have been difficult for youth to meet, learn to work as a team, consult with their peers on content issues, and develop a shared set of priorities, as well as overcome culture shock and jet lag. Allowing enough time for the youth to meet and prepare was essential to their substantive input into the conference.

The three-day program following a three-day preparatory meeting worked very well, but the program was still so full that youth were very tired and over-stimulated. Although some free time was scheduled and youth were able to stay at the hotel in the evenings if they chose, due to the many requests for interviews and

special activities with them, this free time was eroded. The chance to have unstructured time for socializing with each other is important to the team-building process and for potential follow-up work together. It also allows youth to recuperate from an intense and, at times, overwhelming atmosphere. Free time is essential for maintaining enthusiasm, and ensures that youth are able to participate to their fullest.

The youth-only policy for the meeting was critical to an open discussion free of excessive outside influence, but very difficult to ensure. Extra staff were required at the Youth Delegate Meeting room to ensure that members of the media and other adults did not enter.

"The schedules were too busy, but we have an important role to play, so we have to sacrifice a lot."

S.O., youth delegate

Youth involvement throughout the conference

Because youth played a key role at the entire conference, not simply the Youth Delegate Meeting, the youth program was developed to stretch from the preparatory meeting through the Youth Delegate Meeting to the Experts' and Ministerial-Level Meetings. As delegates, the young women and men gave speeches at opening and closing plenaries and at substantive panel and workshop presentations alongside other experts and ministers; they presented their statement, dramatic piece, and video to the plenary; and they participated in workshop discussions. The youth delegates chose to share their roles so that all would have an input into the conference. The workshop speakers and opening and closing speakers usually worked in pairs, dividing their allotted speaking time in half. The youth chose to divide their statement at the Ministerial-Level Meeting into five portions so that more youth could have a chance to speak. The video and a dramatic piece involved those youth who wanted to present their views in more creative, non-verbal forms. The youth delegates also contributed significantly to the Experts' Meeting output document drafting committee, and had a role as observers in the Ministerial-Level Meeting's drafting committee. This was much less dynamic, and they only had a symbolic impact, but it gave the youth a much-appreciated insight into the world of international language negotiation.

Throughout the Experts' and Ministerial-Level Meetings, the youth continued to meet together to plan their input and to review the conference from their perspectives. They also met with dignitaries and other adults and youth at the conference, and had a number of social and tourist activities.

Assessment

In planning the youth role for the entire conference, it was a challenge to establish and maintain appropriate roles for the youth. It was difficult to reserve a significant number of spots for youth delegates to speak, and trying to keep these roles meaningful was even more difficult. Some officials wanted youth to speak strictly about their experiences or about methods of involving youth, not on substantive items. Other organizers wanted to give youth roles for which they felt unprepared. One suggestion was for youth to be rapporteurs—a demanding role for anyone. The youth, however, felt overwhelmed by this proposal, and it was ultimately rejected.

A number of the youth delegates (as well as NGO and government delegates) were not allowed to participate in the ministerial-level workshops. These youth remained observers and were only allowed to attend plenary sessions. Selecting who would be able to attend the ministerial-level workshops was especially difficult for the youth, since they had spent nine days working together. While they handled this with a high degree of maturity and sensitivity to issues of gender, cultural, and linguistic representation, it was a process that could have been disruptive to the sense of group cohesiveness that had been achieved in the days before the Ministerial-Level Meeting.

"They took our recommendations seriously, but treated us like we weren't there in the workshops."

D., youth delegate

Because the adult delegates had advance notice of their speaking roles, they were able to arrive with their speeches. Not wanting to preselect the youth for speaking roles, spaces were simply kept open for youth to speak. A disadvantage of this method was that other topics may have interested them more (although they may not have been able to take these spots). More importantly, youth had to prepare speeches with only a few days' notice. Along with other activities and conference inputs (statement, video), this meant that they worked very late at night.

Youth participation on the drafting committee for the Experts' Meeting was an example of particularly successful youth participation. This was partly due to the youth on this committee, who took their roles very seriously and met outside of the set drafting meeting times in order to review each version of the recommendations and prepare their suggestions. Much credit was also due to the two chairpersons of the drafting committee. They made an effort to solicit input from the youth, who were initially hesitant to speak. The chairpersons met with the youth after the meeting to get individual feedback from them, and incorporated their views with very little editing. The youth who participated in this drafting committee had a real sense of having made an impact on the final recommendations. This was particularly significant for one youth, who wanted very much to speak in the ministerial plenary sessions, but could not because his security could have been compromised upon returning to his home country. The more protected context of the drafting committee allowed his voice to be heard.

Media youth

After the preparatory meeting, 24 Canadian youth became conference delegates while the other 26 entered the media youth stream. The CCFPD wanted to involve more than 24 Canadian youth in the National Forum, and although there was not space for all 50 Canadian youth to become delegates at the conference, the CCFPD wanted to ensure that all the Canadian youth had a role at the conference. A special media stream was therefore created. The youth were asked to choose between the delegate or the media stream. The media youth were given media accreditation, covered press briefings, and were matched with local schools in order to undertake awareness-raising activities. The media youth produced newsletters on their perspective of the conference. Because they had attended the preparatory meetings, they had the difficult task of drawing a line between discussions as friends and information that could be made public.

Assessment

Although efforts were made to ensure that these youth had as important a role as the delegate youth, some felt that they were less privileged. Some media youth came from countries in conflict and wanted to be interviewed, but many media were much less interested in interviewing these youth than the youth delegates. The media youth program was diverse, but not as busy as that of the youth delegates, leaving some feeling that they were not well-occupied. Creating categories of youth is also potentially divisive and damaging to self-esteem. It may have been better to limit the number of Canadian youth at the preparatory meeting so that all could have entered the conference as full delegates.

Adult preparation to work with youth

A three-pronged approach was established to help adults learn to work with young women and men: a sheet on adult guidelines[27] was included in the delegates' handbook; emphasis on the importance of youth participation was made in Canadian officials' speeches; and meetings were held between youth speakers or youth co-chairs and their adult chairs.

[27] See Appendix 3 for adult guidelines for working with youth.

"Experts were fully prepared to participate with the youth but the ministers regarded it with mixed feelings. They all listened well to the youth."

E. and W., youth delegates

One way of facilitating youth and adult interaction was through informal activities. Youth were invited to social events with the adult delegates. Canada's Minister for International Cooperation, Maria Minna, joined the youth several times, once dressed in jeans for icebreaker activities. Ms. Carol Bellamy joined the youth delegates for a casual breakfast conversation. Mr. Olara Otunnu hosted an informal dinner and discussion with the youth. The mayor of Winnipeg invited them for a ride on an antique steam train and a barbecue dinner at a Western-style restaurant. All of these efforts were much appreciated, put the youth delegates at ease, and led to thought-provoking discussions.

The youth delegates noted, however, that although many adults were supportive and encouraging, some were uncomfortable with the youth and did not allow them to speak in workshops.

Assessment

Because many adults are not accustomed to working with youth, especially at an international level, more adult preparation for working with youth would have been useful. Meetings between adult chairs and youth speakers or co-chairs prior to the workshops were organized, but the youth speakers had only been invited to the final portion of the chairs' meeting. The meetings, unfortunately, wrapped up early and the adult chairs had left by the time the youth arrived at the scheduled time.

The adult guidelines for working with youth could have been more extensive and could have been more widely distributed, for example on chairs, in delegates' kits, and in hotel rooms instead of on the last page of the delegates' handbook. Because there was some concern from senior officials that a set of guidelines would imply that adult delegates did not know how to treat other delegates (youth), the guidelines were not given prominence in the conference materials. Internal discussions on the purpose and tone of adult guidelines should be held far in advance of a conference.

Better integration of the youth, especially in social activities, would have helped adult and youth delegates to network. Youth attended all conference events, but efforts to integrate them were not adequate. An attempt to set up a meeting with the youth delegates and NGOs at the conference fell through, as did an effort to have the youth delegates sit with adult delegates at a lunch.

The conference staff, who had been briefed about the youth, what they could contribute, and how they should be supported, were great allies in making the experience a positive one. Those staff who had not been briefed, and who felt that the youth only created extra work and security risks, hindered this process. It was difficult for the logistics staff to change set-up and arrangements that had been created well in advance. The logistics staff did not have enough exposure to the policy staff in order to understand that the Winnipeg Conference had been conceived as a different type of conference, and that it would not follow the traditional model of a ministerial meeting.

Support and services for the youth program

A youth-only room was provided throughout the conference for young men and women who needed to escape an emotionally difficult session or to have a safe space away from the media. This was not simply a lounge, but a necessary support to their mental well-being.

Youth delegates had the 24-hour service of a counsellor to discuss any difficult emotional issues that were raised by the conference. Most of the youth from war-affected countries also came with an NGO chaperone/translator with whom they were familiar. These chaperone/translators understood the cultural context of

the youth delegates, and also helped the young people deal with difficult issues. Youth delegates also had access to medical, legal, and police support.

In terms of their work, the youth delegates had a dedicated work space, with computers and access to the Internet and photocopying services. A local video company that works extensively with youth was hired to facilitate the youth in shooting and producing their video for the conference. A local children's theatre company and a dance instructor who works with physical expression of difficult issues were also hired to help the youth explore the themes and create their dramatic piece.

"Some of the adults don't feel comfortable having youth here. It's difficult to get adults to call on youth during the workshops."

Youth delegates at an evaluation meeting

Assessment

It was extremely important that medical services be in place because a number of international youth sought medical care, largely due to the shock of a new climate, an exhausting schedule, and a different diet. More staff would have been useful to ensure that when youth needed to take a break due to anxiety or stress, they had someone to walk outside with them. The youth-only room was well used as a quiet place to recharge. However, convincing logistics staff that this room was an essential service proved to be very difficult.

The video and dance support was exceptionally useful to the youth, and the staff were very respectful of the vision the youth had for their projects. Providing conference documentation to the youth was not only slow, but also many conference papers were not ready for the youth meeting. If the conference documents had been ready early, it would have been beneficial to have youth-friendly versions of these papers. The youth participation team asked for packages to be created for the youth and delivered to the youth meeting room. Arriving en masse at the documentation centre was another option, but was logistically more difficult to undertake.

The counselling team started late into the conference (only after a youth on a government delegation suffered a mental breakdown), although they had been informed of the conference and were asked for assistance far in advance. Having only one youth logistics staff made it difficult to ensure that appropriate arrangements were made for all of the support services, including the counsellors. Some of the chaperones were very helpful in providing a buffer between the youth and unwanted or inappropriate attention, while others felt pressure to provide the youth for media interviews and were not able to stop unwanted attention as much as was hoped.

Security policy for the youth delegates

Because there were concerns for the safety of the youth and for the liability of the Government of Canada, a security policy developed by senior officials was established. This included a number of measures. Youth were not able to leave the meeting or hotel premises alone. Only Canadian staff were allowed to accompany the youth off-site. A number of liaison officers were hired to take the youth between their hotel and the meeting sites, or to accompany them to various other locations. A check-in at the end of the day was conducted, and security staff were posted at the doors of the youth hotel at night. Because of security concerns, youth were not allowed to exit the meeting site to speak with protesters. Wine and other forms of alcohol, even for those of age, were strictly prohibited.

Assessment

A balance between protection of the youth, "due diligence" of the organizers, and the freedom of movement for the youth was not easily found. At first, the liaison officers (who were instructed by the Protocol Office and not the youth participation team) did not understand their role, and were a bit overzealous in

their duties. Some young people were even prevented from moving around the hotel. Initially, there were not enough Canadian liaison officers to accompany youth wishing to leave the conference site. For those who needed some time alone or time away from a very long and intense conference, this was a frustrating rule. It also failed to reflect the reality of many young people's lives. Some of the youth delegates, especially those who had children of their own or were accustomed to taking care of themselves, found the security policy both overly restrictive and patronizing.

Equal to the problems with the media, the security policy was a second frustrating aspect of the conference for the youth delegates. Many had arrived from countries where they had very little freedom of movement, and the strict security measures made them feel that they were not trusted. Even a simple trip to the post office or the drugstore had to be arranged with a liaison officer. This policy also frustrated the international chaperones, who came with the understanding that they were responsible for the safety of their youth delegates. Earlier discussions and clearer communication about various definitions of an appropriate security policy may have helped to strike a balance.

Translation and language issues

The youth delegates spoke more than 16 different languages. About half of the youth spoke neither English nor French. The plenary room of the Youth Delegate Meeting had simultaneous translation in French and English, and the translator/chaperones translated into the language of the youth delegates they accompanied. In small working groups, the youth relied on their translators and peer translation.

Although the Ministerial-Level Meeting had translation into the official UN languages, some of the youth delegates did not speak these languages and had to rely on their translator/chaperones.

Assessment

The young men and women were quite worried that the adults would think them rude for speaking to their translators during conference proceedings, and were frustrated when the speakers spoke too fast for their translators to keep up. During the Youth Delegate Meeting this was easier to control, but in the Experts' and the Ministerial-Level Meetings it was much more of a problem. It is advisable to ask these translators only to translate into one language (one of the translator/chaperones had to translate into two languages, and lost quite a bit of the original speech in the process).

The role that the youth participation team had envisaged for (and communicated to) the translator/chaperones was not a role with which all were satisfied. Many came from active NGOs and would have preferred to be involved in other conference activities. We realized that we had underutilized the talents of these chaperones and tried to create a more active role for them part-way through the conference.

Meals, hotels, transportation, and other logistics issues

Because many youth had never been to a conference, and many were away from their countries, they needed a number of services that adult delegates would undertake on their own (calling home, gathering, preparing, and copying documents, seeking medical attention when needed, etc.). Detailed instructions for travel were given to the international youth and their chaperones, and all visa arrangements were taken care of by the secretariat and the CAP director. Meals were always provided and taken together, and all transportation in Winnipeg was arranged for the youth delegates. All youth delegates stayed at the same hotel and were accompanied to each event, plenary, or workshop.

Assessment

The support that was given to the youth delegates, such as their transportation requirements, organization of their meetings and social events with dignitaries, and accompaniment of the youth due to the security measures and other needs, required more logistical support than the secretariat had anticipated. A youth-friendly team of logistics people is absolutely essential. Although more staff were needed, our youth logistics team leader was very dedicated to the needs of the youth delegates and showed the flexibility needed to work with young people.

It would have been useful to ensure that the entire logistics team understood the equal importance of the youth delegates and any particular requirements that youth had over and above the adult delegates' requirements. Because most high-level conferences don't involve youth delegates, the logistics staff were not aware of youth requirements and did not have as many human resources and plans as would have been ideal.

Conference follow-up

A number of specific commitments to support ongoing work with the youth delegates and the concept and practice of youth participation were made at the conference. The youth delegates developed the idea of a youth network to share information on the work they would undertake in their own communities, undertake advocacy work, and advise organizations on development programs and international policy development. CIDA committed to supporting this idea by involving the youth as CIDA advisors on projects that affect them, by supporting small projects that the youth design and implement in their own communities, and by supporting the international network to keep in touch with each other and be represented at international meetings concerning war-affected children.

A number of CIDA projects for war-affected children are currently incorporating youth participation as a major component of all stages of the project cycle. Efforts are also underway inside CIDA to raise understanding of and commitment to involving young people in development projects. In addition, small projects designed by the war-affected international youth delegates are being funded through the local NGOs with which the youth work. A network of the international youth delegates has been created, and is anticipated to connect with a Canadian youth network in the near future. Canadian and international youth delegates are regularly invited to speak at CIDA and Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) fora and consultations.

UNICEF and the office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict also committed to supporting the youth in their efforts and to forming youth advisory boards. The first official meeting of UNICEF's youth advisory board for the Global Movement for Children was held at the same time as the January 2001 preparatory committee meeting for the Special Session on Children. An international youth delegate from the Winnipeg Conference brought the views of the Winnipeg youth delegates to this meeting, made a panel presentation at the preparatory committee and, along with other young people, gave input into the draft outcome document for the Special Session. The office of the Special Representative has also been exploring linkages with youth organizations and the possibility of a youth advisory board.

Canada is actively supporting youth participation at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children and at all preparatory meetings for this session. Through DFAIT, Canada has hosted panel discussions on youth participation, contributed to plans to prepare and involve young people in the Special Session,

and included young people on its own delegation. Much of the work to involve young Canadians in the Special Session has been undertaken by Save the Children Canada, which is responsible for selecting, preparing, and accompanying young people to the Special Session and to preparatory committees. CIDA is ensuring that representatives from the Winnipeg youth delegates are at the Special Session.

Many of the youth delegates have themselves undertaken follow-up activities. For example, upon their return to their home communities, many of the young people have given presentations on the conference and have led discussions about the issue and what their youth organization or supporting NGO could do. A number of the Canadian youth delegates have expressed interest in forming an advocacy organization in order to promote understanding of the issue and action to support war-affected children.

Much of the follow-up work with the youth delegates will be undertaken by the NGOs with which the youth are connected. This is one reason that the selection process asked that potential youth delegates be associated with an organization. The CAP project, in collaboration with local NGOs, is continuing to work with many of the international youth delegates who were at Winnipeg, as well as other war-affected young people. Through this project, young men and women from seven countries have collectively identified main issues of concern, are undertaking small projects on these issues, and will share their experiences and ideas with each other via meetings and an electronic network.

Youth representation has been established as a part of the Winnipeg steering committee, tasked with following up commitments from Winnipeg. A representative from the Winnipeg youth delegates attended the Winnipeg follow-up steering committee meeting in New York, January 2001. She brought the priorities and views of the youth delegates at Winnipeg to this meeting. Other youth will have an opportunity to represent the Winnipeg youth delegates at future meetings.

Assessment

Although a number of activities are underway with the youth delegates, it is clear that those young people who are linked with an NGO are better able to access the support they need to undertake follow-up activities. Follow-up with a group of young people who speak different languages and live in scattered, dangerous, and/or remote parts of the world is difficult. Working with the different needs of the groups of young people and the different mandates of the government departments and NGOs who may support them in their work is also challenging.

One idea for follow-up, which unfortunately was not organized, was a video feedback booth. The concept was to have a video booth where ministers, officials, and other adult delegates would respond to the Youth Statement and other youth suggestions. This video would have provided a response to ideas brought forward from young people in the youth delegate's home communities and organizations.

Guidelines, suggestions, and questions to consider when undertaking youth participation at an international conference

As emphasized in this document, participation requires an approach more than a series of steps. The type of techniques or policies that work for one conference or group of youth will change substantially for another. There are, however, some key questions that should be answered when undertaking youth participation at a conference. A list of lessons and guiding questions based on the experience of the Winnipeg Conference is outlined below.[28]

First questions

It is important to clarify and discuss the role that youth will play and the nature of their participation. Organizations are not monoliths, and individuals may hold very different ideas about why and how young people should be involved. Creating a shared understanding of youth participation and overcoming skepticism is essential. Sufficient time must be allocated during early planning to brief officials on the nature and value of youth participation. This time spent setting goals and clarifying assumptions at the outset will save valuable time later.

Questions to help decide the type of participation include:

- What benefit will the conference be to youth, and how will the conference benefit from their input?
- Will the conference be an awareness-raising event for the youth, or will it bring together youth who have already been involved in the issue? Ensure that the youths' expectations meet the type of conference planned (it is not fair or realistic to expect youth, who have little previous knowledge about an issue, to produce groundbreaking suggestions; they will need more time to learn about the issues).
- What degree of political or policy risk is acceptable to the organizers—how tolerant of criticism will the organizers or other delegates be?
- How will the input that youth produce be integrated into the conference? Will they present it themselves? Where will they present it? Will they pass on a statement for others to present? Will the adult delegates discuss the youth input? How will youth see their impact on the final document?
- What will the youth role be in the conference? Will youth be able to participate equally in all workshops and sessions or only in some? Will they attend the same social functions?
- A realistic budget should be set for youth participation. Although youth preferences take fewer resources in some areas (simpler hotels, meals, transportation), the additional staff to support them, preparatory meetings, and incidentals will cost more than for adult delegates. The overall costs are roughly similar for youth delegates and governmental delegates, but the budget should be flexible for different types of costs (e.g., calls home, ordering pizza at the hotel, providing clothes suitable for the climate).

Program for a youth meeting or preparatory meeting

- Prior to the conference, there should be time for the youth delegates to meet alone with the other youth delegates to review information, discuss the issues, and prepare their joint input to the conference. Youth may have less travel experience than adults and may never have been to a conference. They will need time to meet each other and to adjust to a new country, climate, customs, time zone, and new language or translators. Depending on the amount of material

[28] Many of these suggestions stem from the fact that we worked with war-affected young people. For conferences involving other groups of youth, some of the following guidelines may not apply.

they will discuss and the number of inputs they will create for the conference, youth may need up to a week from when they arrive until they join the adult delegates.

- If the youth delegates are selected early, involve them in creating the program and any preparatory meeting. The goals, limitations, and expectations of the entire conference can also be set out to the youth delegates so that they can help decide how to work with these. If the youth program has been set, keep some decisions for the youth. For example, they could choose who speaks in places that have been dedicated for them, what issues they will focus on, and how the inputs to the conference will take shape.
- If it is not possible to consult with youth delegates prior to the conference, consider consulting with a youth advisory group. The selection of this group should be carefully considered so that the young people making decisions for the youth delegates represent as closely as possible the youth who will be involved in the conference (e.g., youth who are working on the same issue). Ideally, these youth will be involved in a youth group or with an NGO so that their views reflect more than their own opinions. The conference organizers should provide as much information as possible to these youth so that they are able to make informed suggestions and decisions about the program. The organizers should also be clear with these young people about their potential role in the conference (will they be automatically selected as delegates, or will they need to apply through the same process as other youth delegates?).
- If youth meet prior to the conference, they should discuss who will take which speaking role. This gives them time to work on their speeches before the conference.
- Try to keep the program as flexible as possible. If youth want to spend more time on one issue and less on another, or want to take the afternoon to rest or work, the schedule should try to accommodate that.
- The program should have a variety of activities in order to reach different youth (e.g., girls, boys, different races, income levels, and learning styles). Activities to explore the issues and prepare for the conference could include writing, group discussion, small-group dialogue, creative and visually based work, movement, drama, and dance.
- Schedule some social and tourist activities, but also allow plenty of free time in the youth schedule. This allows them to catch up on sleep, get to know their peers better, work on conference inputs, and plan for after the conference. The temptation will be to fill this empty time, but for the mental health and productivity of the youth, this time should remain free.
- Do not create different categories of youth, e.g., some who are only given a communications function and not a substantive role in the conference. These divisions are unfair to the youth—they should all be equal delegates with the same responsibilities and privileges.
- Youth delegates should have the opportunity to interact with other youth who attend the conference in country or NGO delegations. It is helpful for youth to meet with others who are working on the same issues.

Youth involvement throughout an adult conference

- If youth are selected early enough, they could have a say in choosing the most appropriate roles for youth delegates in the conference program.
- The role of youth on drafting committees should be considered; inviting youth to participate on these committees is a sign that their views are valued.
- Youth should be considered as equal delegates, but they may also need extra support to undertake this role. One such example would be to have the conference documents collated and distributed to the youth early enough for them to read before the conference.
- Youth roles should be substantive and significant, but appropriate for their knowledge and comfort. For example, adults and youth could co-chair work shops together (this requires a sensitive adult co-chair).
- A youth advisory board could be considered for input into the entire conference program. Careful thought should be put into how this board is chosen and what

role the youth will have in and after the conference. If youth delegates have been selected in advance, they could elect representatives to sit on such a board.

- Ideally, conferences should allow all youth delegates to have equal roles in all parts of the conference. If the number of spaces available at a ministerial meeting is fewer than the number of youth, rotation could be a way to give all youth a chance to interact with ministers.
- Opportunities for interaction with adult delegates are very important to the growth and mentoring of the young men and women—they also help give adults valuable insights and information. Because youth and adults may not naturally mingle, specific events could be created to help encourage this interaction. Lunches with NGO representatives could be arranged. Events with dignitaries and ministers can be arranged so that the youth have some one-on-one time with people of whom they would very much like to ask questions.
- Youth should meet with each other at the end of each day in order to digest the events of the day, ask questions of their facilitator, and plan their input for the following day. In a large conference, this type of "caucus" helps the youth maintain the team they have build prior to the conference and helps address problems as they arise.
- Young people may need time out during the conference, especially if they have had a very tight agenda or if the issues being discussed are particularly disturbing. Chaperones should be available to youth who need to take time off to rest or re-energize.

Facilitators and chaperones

- A sensitive head facilitator with knowledge of the subject matter who has had international experience and has worked extensively with youth is essential. All facilitators (including any support or youth facilitators) should be committed to helping young people clarify and present their own views. The facilitator should be culturally and gender sensitive and be able to work using popular education and a variety of non-verbal and creative techniques. She or he should also be able to help the youth achieve youth meeting goals (e.g., a statement and speeches).
- A number of support facilitators will be necessary for breakout groups. It is essential that these facilitators be familiar with the subject matter, do not manipulate the discussion, and help those who are less extroverted or who are in the minority. Youth can also help facilitate. A daily meeting should be held under the guidance of the head facilitator to review and plan the following day. Ideally, facilitators should represent the gender/cultural/linguistic diversity of the youth delegates.
- If the facilitators and other staff working on the conference have not worked together, it is advisable to meet before the conference to clarify roles, expectations, lines of communication, and decision-making. It is important to clarify this before the stress, intensity, and long hours of the conference start.
- Chaperones (particularly from the same country and language group) play an important function in providing support, helping mitigate culture shock, and ensuring the safety and well-being of the youth. They and the youth should feel comfortable with each other (gender and culture issues should be considered—some youth may only feel comfortable with a same-sex chaperone). A chaperone from the NGO with which the youth is involved can be ideal, particularly for comfort level and follow-up work and familiarity before the conference.
- It is crucial that the chaperones do not dominate or speak instead of youth delegates. They should be fully dedicated to their job of accompanying the youth, translating if necessary, and possibly helping with support facilitation. It is very important to clearly outline the role of the chaperone: Will they be able to have free time? Will they be able to take part in the conference as delegates? Will the chaperones have the opportunity for facilitation work?

Youth delegate selection process

- Allow plenty of time to select youth delegates. With enough time, groups of youth (either from countries or organizations) can select their own representatives and can contribute to these delegates' preparations. A set of selection criteria should be created to let the youth know what the conference will discuss, what age group will be invited as youth delegates, what types of skills (e.g., language skills), experience, and knowledge the delegates should have, and what will be expected of youth delegates. In their nominations, youth should be asked to think about representation from different youth and different experiences (e.g., gender, ethnicity). If the ultimate selection will be made by a group of adults or other youth, a clear selection process with well-outlined criteria lets youth know that the process will be fair.
- Youth delegates should have knowledge and experience working on the issue to be discussed at the conference. They should have connections to an organization such as an NGO on which they can rely to help them prepare, and with which they can continue to work when they return home. Youth who are connected to NGOs and their community are also less likely to seek asylum. Youth delegates should feel comfortable in an international setting and with working with adults. They should take their role of representing the youth in their communities and countries very seriously, and should consult with their peers before the conference.

Youth preparation

- If young women and men will make a substantive contribution, they should have time to prepare for the conference. Information packages that cover substantive content and practical matters should be sent to all youth delegates. If possible, this conference material should be presented in a youth-friendly manner, explaining all acronyms and technical terms. Youth can then discuss their input with their peers and the organizations with which they are affiliated before leaving their country or city.
- Before meeting with adult delegates at a conference, youth should have time alone to meet, learn about each other's work, explore issues together, and work on creating youth suggestions and other input for the conference. This is especially important if youth are meeting for the first time, speak different languages, or come from different cultures. Time without adult observers is essential to develop cohesion, non-competitive and honest discussion, and a youth position that is not geared towards the wishes of influential adults. It also builds team work and allows young men and women to explore ways of working together after the conference.
- If there is enough time, the youth could begin corresponding with each other before the conference.
- If some youth delegates have less experience with the subject matter, they may need extra preparation to allow them to participate equally with the others. Youth who have had less experience with any technical equipment (such as computers, video cameras) should also be given training so that they can participate equally with the other youth delegates.
- Adults should not select "proven" youth speakers or bring in outside youth (who are not part of the youth delegates and their program). Although such youth speakers chosen by adults might help gain the attention of adults, this type of adult selection pushes youth participation towards performance and takes away from the process of participation in which youth choose their representatives and work together to prepare priorities that are reflected in their speeches.
- Youth preparation should include workshops on interactions with the media and with adult delegates, the procedures of an international conference, issues that will be discussed at the conference, and any vocabulary that may be new to the youth. The preparations should also allow plenty of time for them to bring up other issues and develop their particular focus going into the rest of the conference.

- In developing their priorities and focus, youth delegates should be understood as heterogeneous with different backgrounds, identities, and concerns. Different youth should be supported to raise issues of particular relevance to them, instead of trying to reach consensus on all points to be raised in the conference.
- Preparations with the youth should help them understand how an international conference works and what protocols will be used. In essence, this helps young men and women learn to adapt to adult culture. Youth are often expected, and prepared to participate, in an adult milieu; however, it shows respect for youth culture if the adults try to accommodate themselves to an environment more comfortable for youth. If the conference is flexible, informal and creative youth-friendly activities could be undertaken with all delegates (youth delegates could help to determine these activities).

Adult preparation

- Meetings should be arranged so that youth speakers and co-chairs can meet their adult chairs before the actual workshops. A meeting between the conference organizers and adult chairs and rapporteurs in order to explain the role of the youth delegates, and to provide some tips for involving the youth in their workshop discussions, would also be very useful.
- A set of adult guidelines for working with youth can explain the importance and role of the youth delegates, and can help adult delegates interact with the youth during the conference and social events.
- Because there are many demands on the time of dignitaries and ministers, it is beneficial to pre-set time for the youth to meet alone with the hosting ministers or dignitaries. This time shows the youth that they are important contributors and have input that is necessary to the work of the conference. The interaction is not only appreciated by the youth, but can be extremely informative for the ministers. Members of the media could cover part of a meeting between the youth and the ministers; however, time without this coverage is essential for the ministers to be able to talk more naturally with the youth.
- An important part of facilitating youth participation at a conference is to brief the conference organizers, staff, and logistics people at key points in the conference preparations. A meeting with small groups could be held to explain the importance of involving youth, their status as full delegates, and any special needs that will involve the conference staff.

Language issues and translation

- If the conference will involve different languages, translation should be made available to the youth during as many parts of the conference as possible. Youth should have the same access to simultaneous translation devices as adults.
- Facilitators should help youth who speak other languages by slowing the conversation and pausing when necessary. They should make a special effort to invite youth who speak other languages to share their thoughts. The facilitators should know how to work at a speed that is appropriate for youth who are listening to translation.
- If possible, facilitators should represent the languages of the youth delegates and should take turns speaking different languages.
- Translation by peers works best for breakout groups, since formal translation requires microphones and a more formal seating arrangement. Peer translation also helps to build group cohesion and creates important roles for youth. Chaperones may also double as translators.
- Adult delegates should be made aware that the youth may need to speak quietly to each other and their chaperones in order to translate the proceedings.

Logistics and conference services

- In order to support the youth delegates adequately, there should be enough conference staff to cover all potential needs. Adequate numbers of dedicated logistics staff are important so that policy staff can concentrate on the program

and issues of content. A team of dedicated logistics staff (plus chaperones/liaision officers if required) is suggested for the youth program. These staff would liaise with the larger team of logistics staff to ensure that youth requirements for meeting rooms, meals, hotels, transportation, documentation, etc. are well-planned.

- Ensure that professional counselling services are available to youth and that they know how to get in touch with these counsellors. It is ideal if the young people come with chaperones whom they know and with whom they feel comfortable. These persons can also help the youth deal with culture shock or with difficult issues raised at the conference.
- A youth-only room should be provided for young men and women who need to escape an emotionally difficult session, or to have a safe space away from the media. This is not simply a lounge, but should be understood as a necessary support to their mental well-being.
- A dedicated work room with computers and access to photocopying and the Internet is very helpful for the youth delegates to complete their statements, speeches, and other work. Although youth could use delegate centres, they may find it difficult to get access to shared computers.
- Other services for youth should be available from youth-friendly professionals (doctors, nurses, lawyers, police officers, etc.) who have been briefed about the conference, the youth, and their role. Youth organizers should know where to go to seek these people.
- Conference documentation should be made available to the youth—preferably in a jargon-free, youth-friendly format. Because youth meetings often precede the rest of the conference, and because conference documentation is often prepared up to the last moment, it is crucial to make arrangements with the documentation staff ahead of time. Youth cannot work as full delegates without the appropriate information.
- Providing clothing that is appropriate to the climate should be considered. If clothes are provided for visiting youth, some clothing should also be offered to all youth delegates. Similar clothing such as T-shirts for all youth delegates also helps to equalize the differences in income.

Security

- Conference organizers should create a security policy well in advance of the conference. The policy should respect the rights of young people, while providing safety and security.
- Questions to answer include: Will youth be allowed to go out of the hotel or conference facility on their own? If so, at what times of the day or night? If not, who will accompany them if they need to leave, e.g., for health reasons? How will the youth contact this person? Who will check the youth in at night, and will a watchperson be on duty all night? Will security include protecting the youth, e.g., will security people help protect the youth from unwanted visitors and members of the media? What is the role of the chaperones vis-à-vis the security personnel?
- Youth delegates should, if at all possible, be involved in discussing the security concerns of the organizers and their own concerns, and in designing a security policy to meet these concerns. The security policy should be explained to the youth at the beginning of the conference.
- If the security policy requires using liaison officers to accompany the youth, it is crucial to provide adequate numbers of these officers in order to ensure the freedom of movement of the youth. These liaison officers should enjoy working with youth, ideally speak some of the same languages of the youth, and participate in some activities with the youth before the conference. The same staff should be involved with the youth throughout the conference. It is essential that these staff have a clear understanding of the security policy, to whom they report, and their specific duties. These duties should be developed with those working on youth participation, as well as protocol or logistics staff.

Preparation for media coverage

- Prepare printed guidelines for members of the media (with the youth if possible) or hold a workshop for members of the media to outline the need for sensitivity in working with youth. The fact that media representatives will be covering a conference at which youth are participating can be taken as an opportunity to educate members of the media about the rights of youth. If the guidelines and access are equal for all members of the media (including any media youth), then they will be more willing to respect these guidelines.
- Conduct workshops with the young people to help them prepare for media attention. The potentially negative as well as positive results of being interviewed should be discussed. Youth should be helped to say "no" to specific questions or to stop the interview. Role-playing is useful for this purpose.
- In a quiet moment before the conference, each youth delegate should be asked by a person they trust if they would like to be interviewed. This discussion should occur after the media workshop with the youth delegates. Two lists should be made: youth who do not wish to have media coverage, and those who do. This list would be given to all youth organizers and to all communications staff. If a youth wishes to change her or his mind, she or he should discuss this with the same trusted person and ask to be put on the interview list. This would help prevent other adults from pressuring youth into saying yes.
- Youth organizers could bring a list of media requests to the group of youth delegates each day. Together the youth could decide who would take the interviews from the interview list. This would alternate the opportunities for interviews among youth who seek them, and would give support to those who maybe on the interview list but do not wish to be interviewed on that day.
- Discuss security and privacy issues with all conference organizers, not just those working on the youth program. Underscore the importance of respecting youth delegates' time, and their right to say "no" to interviews. All people working on the conference should understand that a reporter's need to get a story should never be allowed to supersede a young person's right to privacy and safety, or to the important work they are undertaking with the other youth delegates.
- Media interviews should not disturb the substantive work of the youth. Specific times should be set aside for media interviews, and no other youth program activities should be scheduled for these times. Sufficient staff should be available to accompany the youth to interviews.
- If outreach to youth is to be undertaken as part of a communications or public relations strategy, hire specific communications staff to create these activities.

Follow-up

- When planning a conference, there can be a tendency for adult organizers to see the conference as an end point. Youth, however, are likely to see it as a beginning —a beginning of new relationships with others that they will want to continue in some way, a beginning of networking opportunities, or a beginning of a dialogue with adults they hope will result in action.
- Selecting youth who have been attached to an organization and will continue their work after the conference is one way to ensure that the youth have support and follow-up after the conference.
- Organizers should be prepared to respond to youth on this subject and should be clear about what type of follow-up activities might be supported. Youth may want to know what has happened to their suggestions and what actions have resulted from their work. They may ask for a small amount of funding to undertake projects of their own.
- Youth should be involved in follow-up committees that will help implement the conference commitments.
- Youth representatives should be encouraged (perhaps with the assistance of their supporting NGOs) to give presentations to their peers and youth organizations on their experiences and reflections from the conference. Such presentations could include a discussion on next steps for the young people.

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Appendices

1. Structure of youth participation in the International Conference on War-Affected Children

September 7-9: Youth delegates (Canadian and international) and media youth (Canadian) attend pre-conference preparatory meetings.

September 10-12: Youth delegates attend Youth Delegate Meeting segment of the conference. Media youth attend press briefings and undertake outreach in local schools.

September 13-15: Youth delegates attend Experts' Meeting segment of the conference.

September 16-17: Half of the youth delegates attend Ministerial-Level Meeting segment of the conference; the other half are observers and attend plenaries with other observers.

2. Youth delegate nomination letter

INVITATION TO NOMINATE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DELEGATES TO ATTEND THE WINNIPEG CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN.

Dear colleague,

As you may be aware, Ministers Lloyd Axworthy and Maria Minna are co-sponsoring an international conference on war-affected children in Winnipeg, September 2000. As the first global, ministerial-level gathering on the issues faced by war-affected children, the Winnipeg conference aims to galvanize the international community to re-focus its collective and individual actions in support of war-affected children. The conference will bring together war-affected and interested governments, UN agencies, international organizations, youth, researchers, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. This conference promises to be an important policy and programming event.

A distinguishing feature of this conference will be the active participation of youth. A number of young people will participate as full delegates in the conference. They will make presentations and statements, will discuss the issues facing war-affected children and will work with the other delegates to formulate policy and strategies for action. Youth will speak from the authority of their lived experience, providing an important contribution to the development of policies that will create concrete and practical interventions to break the cycle of violence which has affected the lives of so many young people.

Approximately 50 youth will attend the Winnipeg Conference as delegates. This includes:

1) Canadian youth, many of whom are refugees from conflict areas. Canadian youth are being prepared and selected through a series of National Forum meetings across Canada.

2) Select international youth participating in the Children as Peacebuilders project. This project is supporting youth from various war-affected countries to identify and analyse the issues most important to them and to understand their experience within a global context.

3) International youth leaders who are engaged with the issue.

WE ARE INVITING YOUR ORGANIZATION TO NOMINATE A YOUNG PERSON IN THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH LEADERS CATEGORY.

This document provides guidance in your selection of a potential delegate. It includes a profile of a successful candidate as well as criteria which will guide the selection committee's decision.

PROFILE OF A SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE:

- A young person with strong analytical abilities and the capacity to speak in public events involving both adults and youth.
- Active participant in a program for war-affected youth.
- Acknowledged leader in her/his organization.
- A person who has been able to translate his/her experience of war into a broader, global understanding and analysis and who is able to undertake a policy discussion.
- Someone who is involved in the active promotion of community-based peacebuilding work.
- A person with some experience of conferences or meetings, preferably at an international level.

OTHER CRITERIA WHICH WILL GUIDE THE COMMITTEE'S SELECTION:

The committee hopes to have a good gender balance as well as representation of youth from a variety of countries and situations. As the conference will focus on policy, the committee believes that young people in the 16-20 age range would be most appropriate. The ability to speak English or French is desirable. As some international youth will be asked to interact with the international media (in a pre-arranged and chaperoned setting), it is desirable that the nominated youth is comfortable with such contact.

WE WELCOME YOUR NOMINATION OF YOUTH WHO FIT THE ABOVE CRITERIA

We anticipate that the international youth delegates will be in Canada for up to two weeks. Funding for youth delegates will be provided by the conference secretariat. Chaperones will accompany the youth.

The schedule of activities for the youth will be confirmed by late July. The main events in which they will be involved include:

- Pre-conference preparatory meeting
- Youth Delegate Meeting at the Winnipeg Conference
- Experts' Meeting at the Winnipeg Conference
- Ministerial-Level Meeting at the Winnipeg Conference

Note: A select number of youth delegates will speak and participate at the Ministerial-Level Meeting. These representatives will be chosen by the youth delegates during the Youth Delegate Meeting prior to the conference.

3. Adult guidelines for working with youth

In addition to young people preparing themselves to work with adults in a conference setting, adults may also need some preparation to work with young people. The guidelines below were created by the youth participation team. A shorter version of these guidelines was included in the Delegates Handbook, which was distributed to all conference delegates.

Youth Participation at the International Conference on War-Affected Children

The International Conference on War-Affected Children in Winnipeg is one of the first conferences of its kind to include young people as full delegates. The experiences and perspectives of the youth attending the conference are a unique and valuable resource that will enrich the discussions at the Experts' and Ministerial-Level Meetings. The inclusion of youth delegates at the conference is based on the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which upholds the right of young people to participate and make their views known on matters affecting them.

Some participants in the Experts' and Ministerial-Level Meetings may not have prior experience of working directly with youth as delegates in an international conference. Therefore, the youth participation team of the conference secretariat has prepared the following suggestions on youth participation. We hope these will help maximize the benefits of this opportunity for adults and youth to work together as equal partners on issues of common concern.

- Listen to youth delegates with the same respect you would show to an adult delegate.
- Feel free to ask youth what they think if they are quiet. If done in a non-demanding way, this may help facilitate their participation, and include those who have not yet spoken. At the same time, bear in mind that there may be times when youth will want to simply listen and learn from adult delegates.
- Include youth in all parts of the discussions; don't limit their participation to brief statements at the beginning of a workshop.
- Most of the international youth delegates speak neither English nor French as a first language. Avoid the use of colloquialisms, "buzz words" and unfamiliar acronyms, but don't oversimplify or "talk down" to youth.
- Some international youth will be accompanied by chaperones/translators. Please address and respond to the youth directly, rather than deferring to their adult partners.
- This will be the first experience of a high-level international conference for many of the youth delegates. While they will have been briefed on the nature of the proceedings, bear in mind that they will be learning about conference processes through immersion in them.
- Remember that youth will hold a range of opinions on conference issues, just as adult delegates will.
- Youth may at times speak from personal experiences, and at other times speak more generally of the experiences of young people in their country, but should not be expected to speak on behalf of all war-affected children. Youth should not be pressured to speak about their personal experiences if they are not comfortable doing so.
- Youth will come with many experiences to share, but it is unrealistic to expect them to have solutions to every problem. Approach problem-solving as a joint process.
- Remember that the youth are experts in many of the conference topics, and have the same status as the adult delegates at the conference.

4. Program for the Youth Delegate Meeting

September 7-9, 2000: Youth pre-conference preparatory meetings

Youth Delegate Meeting,
Day One: Sunday, September 10

1. Welcome, tour of facilities and context for the conference
2. Teambuilding exercise
3. Overview of next three days
4. Official Welcome and discussion with:
   The Hon. Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs
   The Hon. Maria Minna, Minister for International Cooperation
   Nancy Wildgoose, Secretary-General, the International Conference on War-Affected Children
5. Small-group review of separate international and Canadian discussions from pre-conference meetings. Plenary: Pulling together the work of different groups, creating a basis for the youth statement
6. Walkaround activity on four of the conference themes:
   - Role of youth in conflict and peacebuilding
   - Legal tools for prevention and protection
   - Accountability
   - Protection for children during conflict

Lunch

7. Discussion of conference inputs, production teams needed and self-selection for these production teams
8. Small group discussions and recommendations on the conference themes
9. Plenary: Feedback from thematic groups and discussions
10. Break into production teams (dramatic piece, video, speeches, statement, media spokespersons, workshop presentations) to integrate ideas on the themes into the conference inputs
11. Feedback/evaluation of the day

Dinner and bowling/free time

Day Two: Monday, September 11

1. Review of the day's agenda
2. Warm-up activity
3. Walkaround activity on the remaining five conference themes and other themes of interest to the youth delegates:
   - Peacebuilding strategies
   - Conflict prevention
   - Role of the media in protecting children
   - Reporting violations to children's rights
   - Children's rights and the military
4. Small-group discussion of and recommendations on conference themes
5. Plenary: Feedback from thematic groups and discussions

Lunch

6. Work in production teams to integrate the ideas from the morning session into the conference inputs
7. Participation as a right—preparation for participation in the remainder of the conference. Presentation and discussion with organizers of the Experts' and Ministerial-Level Meetings and outcome document processes. Self-selection of youth representatives for outcome document committees
8. Feedback/evaluation of the day

Dinner and dance on a river boat

Day Three: Tuesday, September 12

1. Review of agenda and warm-up activity
2. Walkaround activity on the eight conference caucus issues:
   - Small arms
   - Child soldiers
   - Land mines
   - Adolescents
   - Refugee and internally displaced children
   - Gender and conflict
   - HIV/AIDS and conflict
   - Psychosocial healing
3. Small-group discussions on caucus issues
4. Plenary on caucus issues, reports from small groups

Lunch

5. Work in production teams to integrate the ideas from the morning session into the conference inputs
6. VIPP exercise (using sticky papers) to identify concerns related to working with the media during the conference; preparation for the September 13 youth press conference
7. Concluding remarks

Dinner, drama presentation and discussion with the Sierra Leone youth drama project or free time

5. Youth Statement at the International Conference on War-Affected Children

Good afternoon, Merhaba, hosh galden, baherben, salut, taato, mire dita, somkorup, fellow delegates.

We would like to welcome you and thank you for this opportunity to participate in this conference. Although some of us now live in peace in Canada, among us we represent war-affected children worldwide.

We speak to you as young people with the experience of war. We have lost out homes and our schools. We have been abused, tortured, and raped. We have witnessed brutal murders and have been abducted and separated from out families. Some of us have fought in wars against our own kin.

We also speak to you as young people who want to be involved in building peace in our communities. We have many concerns but also many ideas that we would like to share with you.

Based on what we have seen and are seeing, what we have felt and are feeling, as well as what we have shared with one another, we have come to a consensus that children are the people most affected by war.

During this conference, we have heard a lot of rhetoric about how young people are the leaders of the future. While not dismissing the truth of this statement, we say that we have a crucial role to play in our societies now. Our recommendations to improve our future must be respected, and we need to be involved in the planning and implementation in all levels.

From this conference, we want to see practical solutions that benefit war-affected children emerge. We wish to see the mere discussions of these issues cease and encourage action to see more and better quality support for war-affected children. Many of the solutions are already there (for example the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*), but so far we have not seen any strong and effective actions regarding what has been written.

We would like to share with you what we strongly believe to be the main priorities that have been highlighted by us, the young experts in this conference.

Education

Around the world, there are tens of thousands of children who, because of wars, are denied their right to education. Education is the key to preventing conflicts and to rebuilding our lives after conflict. We demand quality education be provided to all children affected by war. In addition to courses offered in national curriculum, education needs to emphasize awareness through teaching the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Self-understanding and development must be motivated through capacity-building, leadership training, and the exploration of issues such as women's rights and democracy. This education must be provided both during and after war.

Adults also need access to education, especially education that makes them aware of children's rights.

All children need to be encouraged to accept diversity and tolerance. Education is an essential component of peace-building. Empowerment must begin at the community level. Long-term conflict prevention begins with social education.

Building peace

War destroys everything—our schools, our homes, our families, our communities, our jobs, our health and our souls. War destroys our childhood. We need to rebuild all of these things to create healthy communities. On our journey to peace, we need long-term support and assistance.

Beyond simple survival, we need individual, family, and community healing. This means promoting cultural and social activities that teach our communities to work together. As over half of the population of our countries, we are needed to build peace today and to make it last for tomorrow. We are an important part of our communities and want to play a role in making decisions and taking action. We ask government officials, friends, parents, teachers, and other sympathetic adults to help us to learn about and become involved in all political processes—from our neighbourhoods to the United Nations.

To build peace and prevent war, we need long-term commitments that help us to defeat poverty. We want local people to lead the development, but we need access to skills, knowledge and tools to improve the economies of our communities. When people can make a good living and respect all people regardless of their gender, age, or ethnicity, it is less likely that they will go to war. People need to have enough money so that they are not forced to partake in conflicts.

Refugees and internally displaced people

During war many people, including women and children, are denied their right to safety. Without refuge, children are likely to be hurt, maimed, killed, or manipulated into joining rebel factions and other groups that destroy their innocence. It is crucial that sanctuary be made available, regardless of expense. Because of war, many children and their families are unable to return to their communities. We demand that the international community take actions to allow all refugees and internally displaced people to safely return home. For those who feel trapped within refugee camps, it is necessary that they be provided equal and essential basic needs, including satisfactory food rations and sanitary living conditions. All child refugees must be offered free education, as a child's learning process must not be interrupted by displacement.

Refugees need more flexible and efficient assistance in receiving the proper documentation to allow access to aid while they are in the camps and re-integration within their own communities following the conflict.

Leadership roles within the camp should be equally distributed among all, including adolescents. We must be involved in making the decisions and helping to plan programs inside refugee camps.

Tools for destruction

Preventative measures are needed to protect the rights of children worldwide. In order to protect our children, we must prohibit the production and trading of weapons, including small arms and landmines. The quantity of small arms that a country can export, import, or stockpile is currently unregulated. An independent international organization should be put in place to monitor and facilitate all arms trade, as well as assist countries in establishing internal small arms control. Such an organization should facilitate the ban on arms sale to governments that do not operate within human rights standards. Also, in post-war situations, disarmament processes must be encouraged where small arms can be recovered and destroyed. Destruction of these arms means ensuring that they will never be reused. All companies and nations involved in the production and use of landmines must be put to shame.

Violations against children's rights

During war we are more vulnerable to the abuse of your rights. War makes our societies more violent, and children suffer the results of this violence. Children are orphaned without any support, abducted to serve in armies, sexually abused by armed groups and may be forced into prostitution because there are no alternatives when family members are killed. In some cases children are dehumanized through drugs and propaganda. In other cases, child soldiers choose to become soldiers in order to protect themselves and their families, or to gain food, shelter, and in some cases, a sense of family. In either case, rehabilitation programs are needed to deal with all aspects of war-related trauma among youth both during and after conflict. In order to recover, we need counselling and we need to know our rights—the right not to be abused, raped, especially in times of war when we are vulnerable to abuse.

In the case of child soldiers, we demand that no young person under the age of 18 be recruited by either force or choice into the armed forces. Those who refuse to abide by this fundamental human right should be punished and shamed among the nations.

How we will help to work on these issues

Through examination of our priorities and recognition of the vital importance of action, we have come to the conclusion that as youth, it is ultimately our responsibility to put our own words into action and urge the adult participants of this conference to follow suit.

6. Conference evaluation questions for youth delegates

In addition to daily feedback sessions and oral evaluations at the end of the Experts' and Ministerial-Level Meetings, the following questions were sent to all youth delegates for the preparation of this paper.

1. Did youth have an impact at the conference? How, what was the impact? If not, why not?

2. Were the adult delegates prepared to participate with the youth? Did they listen to youth? What was the biggest obstacle to youth participating equally with adult delegates at the conference?

3. Did you feel well-prepared to participate with the adult delegates at the conference? If yes, what preparations were most useful for you? If no, what else would have helped?

4. What do you think you contributed to the conference?

5. What do you think you took away from or learned at the conference?

6. What was most the most exciting or interesting part of the conference?

7. What was most the most frustrating or maddening part of the conference?

8. Are there any practical things or suggestions that would have made your conference experience better?

9. What would you like to see come out of the conference and what would you like for your role in this? What are your ideas on the youth network and how it will work?